



# KASHMIR PRINCESS



The Author

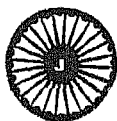
# KASHMIR PRINCESS

By

**A. S. KARNIK**

Foreword by

Hon'ble Sri V. K. KRISHNA MENON



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## Foreword

In the mid-afternoon of the 11th April 1955, the "*Kashmir Princess*" of the Air-India International crashed into the South China Sea near Sarawak and thus ended a journey which proved to be ill-fated instead of a normal and safe flight from Hong Kong to Jakarta, as it was fully expected to be. All the passengers were drowned with the plane as was their heroic Captain Jatar and the gallant air-hostess Gloria Berry, who from all accounts to the last, held to their post of duty. The earlier news had it that it was an engine fire that crashed the plane. We know now that the air crash and the fatal disaster to the plane and its complement of passengers and crew were part of an international crime and assassination.

The fate of the "*Kashmir Princess*" is thus, not just another airplane disaster, but an unpunished, though not undiscovered, international crime. The responsibility for it rests not only on the hands that placed the time bomb in the plane, but also on those who planned and condoned the evil deed. These are parts of the tragedy of world conflicts and intolerance and of the tension that keeps the world awed by the menace of war and annihilation.

These pages are a survivors' story; three of the crew, Co-pilot Captain Dikshit, Flight Navigator Pathak and Anant Shridhar Karnik are the sole survivors. It is vivid, graphic and moving. It is perhaps ironic that out of the tragedy, in this case, of inhumanity, has emerged an epic

of endurance and of supreme courage against truly overwhelming odds. Anant Shridhar Karnik himself says that neither he nor his friends thought of him as a "hero." He was, and he prefers to be an Aircraft Ground Engineer. He did not seek adventure or adversity for amusement, but met both these with courage, loyalty and devotion to duty.

When we travel by an aircraft across the great open seas and each time the stewardess comes in and dons a life-belt for demonstration purposes and speaks the well-known words, "As Life Boat Drill is a normal routine on board ship, we would like to show you how to use a life-jacket in the unlikely event of an emergency landing on water . . .", a great many of us laugh and few take it really seriously. Here is at least one instance where the life-belt, coupled with the qualities that Karnik and his colleagues exhibited, saved their lives and lived to tell the story. I feel sure that every reader of these pages will find this book the binding spell I did. One might well say that Aircraft Engineers do make good writers, but one fondly hopes that one should not have to wait for incidents and near death for a story to be told as well as Karnik has done. This feeling itself is testimony both to what has been said and how it has been said.

I will not spoil this story by seeking to interpret it or to summarise it. I would like the reader to be able to share with the writer both his thrilling experience and the great sense of bereavement and tragedy as I have done. The anxieties and uncertainties that appear in this book read almost like a piece of fiction and it is hard sometimes to believe that it is a true story, and one may sometimes lose the sense of the grim reality of this event by the moving drama, though a tragedy.

The "*Kashmir Princess*" crashed in the South China Seas. Valiant Captain Jatar, whose great heroism and devotion to duty, which Karnik records, he treated as commonplace. The sense of discipline and fortitude of the passengers, Chinese and others, the presence of mind of the air-hostess Gloria Berry; the discipline of the crew—they all will live in history. One hopes that this book will attract a large circle of readers the world over and it might make some contribution in stirring the conscience of the world and to awaken a sense of greater international responsibility in respect of such crimes of political assassination.

Not least of all the moving parts of these pages are those that deal with the Indonesian Islanders, the Captain and the crew of H.M.S. *Dampier* and a number of others who brought aid and succour to Karnik and his friends.

I cannot do better than echo the sentiments of the author in the tribute that he has recorded in his chapter of dedication to the glorious memory of Captain Jatar, D'Cunha, Pimenta, D'Souza, and Gloria Berry, and the eleven passengers, Chinese and others all of whom were on their errands of peace and fraternity and service but fell at the hands and machinations of international assassins.

This book is dedicated to their memory. I feel, as the author does now, years after the crash, the horror of it even as one is moved by the thrilling story.

To Karnik and his friends who swam ashore with him, we pay our tribute and wish them all good fortune.

NEW DELHI,  
April 19, 1958.

V. K. KRISHNA MENON

## Introductory Notes



CAPT. M. C. DIKSHIT

The evening was young, the sun still high above the horizon. The engines of the "KASHMIR PRINCESS" hummed with a soothing drone. Below lay the emerald expanse of the South China Sea. Ahead lay Djakarta.

The ominous thud of a muffled explosion sent a shudder throughout the aircraft. The conversation ceased abruptly, every face wore an apprehensive look. The right wing was on fire and like a mortally wounded eagle the "Princess" made a valiant though unsuccessful attempt to alight safely on the sea.

Heroism displayed that evening within the narrow confines of the cockpit and cabin was no less than the valour shown on any battle-field. Captain Jatar, cool and unperturbed, issued orders while battling with the controls,

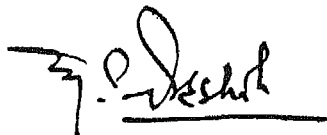
unmindful of the choking smoke. Gloria Berry was busy distributing life-jackets and helping passengers into them. The passengers themselves, a little tense, sat quietly in their respective places.

The story occupying front pages for days, quickly took on the flavour of an epic. It was an inspiring reminder that the peculiar power of God-given courage which had helped Man to conquer the air, was still very much alive. And still triumphant.

In grateful and loving memory of those who gave their lives so that we, the survivors, may live, I humbly bow my head. They may not be with us, but their memories and their names will live for many a long year. Some friends have proposed erecting a life-sized bust of Capt. Jatar at the main entrance to the new Terminal Building at Bombay Airport. The statue when erected will symbolise the best traditions of Indian aviation. In addition, it would serve as a guiding beacon to successive generations of Indian aviators.

This book will prove to be one of the most memorable reading experiences in the lives of many. In simple words, infused by admiration and love for his brother officers, Mr. Karnik has exquisitely recorded a tragic human experience. I am sure, it will give countless readers a profound reassurance that when skill is armed with courage, there is nothing in life which is too much or too great to face.

NEW DELHI,  
10 April 1958

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'M. C. Dikshit', written over a horizontal line.

M. C. DIKSHIT



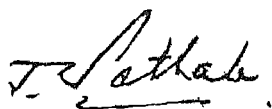
MR. J. C. PATHAK

It is with mixed feelings that I write this little note in appreciation of my friend ANANT KARNIK's book on the "KASHMIR PRINCESS." To be reminded of a tragic event in one's life is not a very pleasant thing, but in writing this book KARNIK is only paying homage to the memory of sixteen innocent people who lost their lives in the crash, and I, as one of his co-survivors would like to join him in it.

It is only natural that one should think of the people one knew so well. I remember Captain JATAR as one of the best commanders under whom I have had the privilege to serve, and I can never forget the calm determination and indomitable courage that he displayed against inhumanly heavy odds, and which resulted in our survival. I shall always cherish the memory of my friendship and

comradership with my colleagues KEN D'CUNHA, CEDRIC D'SOUZA and JOE PIMENTA, whose selfless devotion to duty and exemplary courage are impossible to be forgotten. Lastly, how can I ever forget the lovable GLORIA BERRY whose hands it were that gave me the life-jacket which finally saved my life, and whose quiet efficiency in the face of danger kept up the morale of the passengers and crew alike.

LONDON,  
14 March 1958

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'J. C. Pathak'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

J. C. PATHAK

## Author's Note

"Did you jump out of the airplane?"

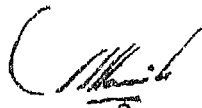
"Who picked you up from the water?"

"Did any passengers shriek when the fire broke out?"

Such were the questions I had encountered from numerous friends and colleagues. It was with these friends in view that I set out to write an account of the last flight of the *Kashmir Princess*. In writing this account, I have been able to pay homage to my colleagues who in spite of supreme courage had to be unwitting victims of a great tragedy.

The dialogues and the scenes which I did not actually witness are reconstructed from information obtained later from my co-survivors, and the crew members' families. The only liberty taken by me is to present some of the facts in the lives of crew members as their inner thoughts.

Not being a man of letters there are bound to be numerous shortcomings in the presentation of this account. However, it is hoped that such shortcomings will be overlooked, as the underlying idea of the foregoing pages is to present an account of the fateful flight of the *Kashmir Princess*.



BOMBAY  
April 11, 1958

(A. S. KARNIK)



## Acknowledgment

A book of this nature needs co-operation and help from a number of persons.

First of all I thank the families of the crew members for furnishing me with their life-sketches and photographs.

To Hon. Sri V. K. Krishna Menon, our Defence Minister, I will ever be indebted for the trouble he took in going through the manuscript and writing the Foreword to this book.

The photographs of the Chinese delegates with their lifesketches were received through the courtesy of the Consulate General of the People's Republic of China in Bombay and the Hon'ble Mr. Chou-En-lai, for which I am thankful to them.

I am grateful to the officials of the Air-India International Corporation—Mr. K. Vishwanath, Mr. V.G. Gadgil, and Mr. K. G. Appusamy for having spared their valuable time to read the manuscript and to Mr. B.K. Patel, General Manager, and Capt. A. C. Gazdar, Technical Director, for the kind permission on behalf of the Corporation to publish this account with photographs.

Amongst numerous friends without whose encouragement and help the book would not have been possible are Mr. K. A. Abbas, Mr. Arun Vora and Mr. Ramesh Sanghavi to whom I will ever remain indebted.

I thank Mr. Shrikrishna Khadilkar for having patiently gone through the manuscript and given valuable suggestions, and Mr. Manohar Pandit for carefully going through the proofs.

I particularly thank Mr. K. S. Ranade who took great pains in designing this book.

My co-survivors, Capt. M. C. Dikshit and Mr. J. C. Pathak kindly read the manuscript and gave messages for this book, without which it would have been incomplete.

*Lastly, I must mention that it was possible to complete this story only due to the persistent reminders of my uncle Mr. S. B. Shringarpure and my wife Kamalini.*

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THE KASHMIR PRINCESS

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RIGHT HAND WHEEL-WELL

RIGHT HAND WING OF THE KASHMIR PRINCESS  
ONE OF THE ENGINES OF THE KASHMIR PRINCESS

A SHARK CAUGHT AT THE SITE OF CRASH  
PART OF THE CLOCK MECHANISM OF THE TIME BOMB

CAPTAIN D. K. JATAR  
MISS GLORIA BERRY

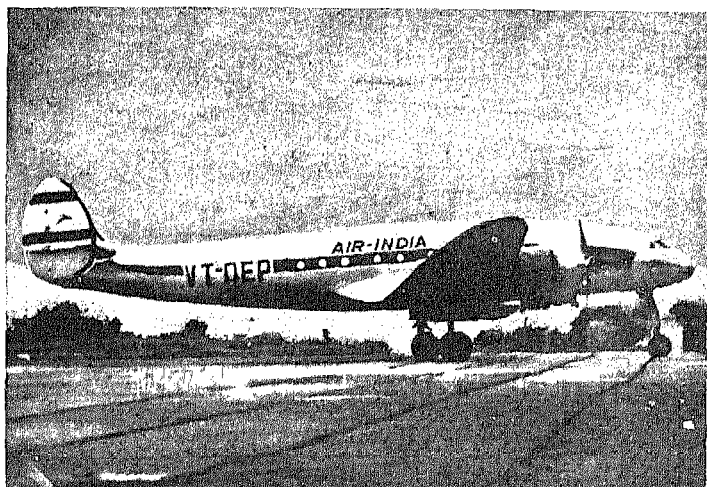
MR. K. F. D'CUNHA  
MR. C. D'SOUZA  
MR. J. J. PIMENTA

MR. SHIH CHIH-ANG  
MR. LI CHAO-CHI  
MR. CHUNG PU-YUN  
MR. SHEN CHIEN-TU

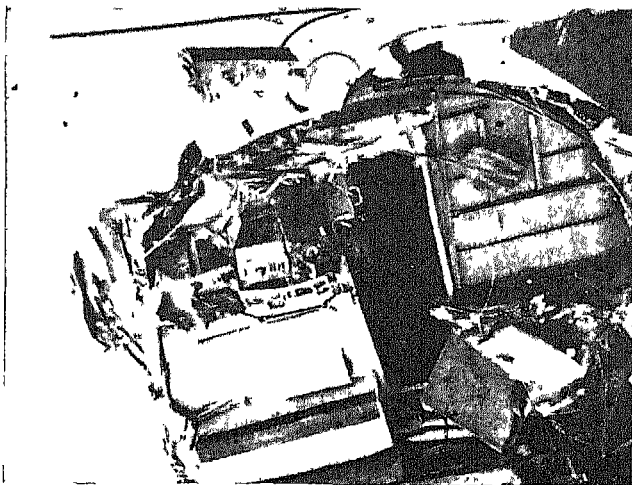
MR. WANG TSO-MEI  
MR. TU HUNG  
MR. LI PING  
MR. HAO FENG-KO

**NOTE :**

It is regretted that the photographs of Dr. Friedrich Jensen, Mr. Jeremi Strace and Mr. Vuong Pinh Phoong could not be obtained at the time of printing.



THE KASHMIR PRINCESS



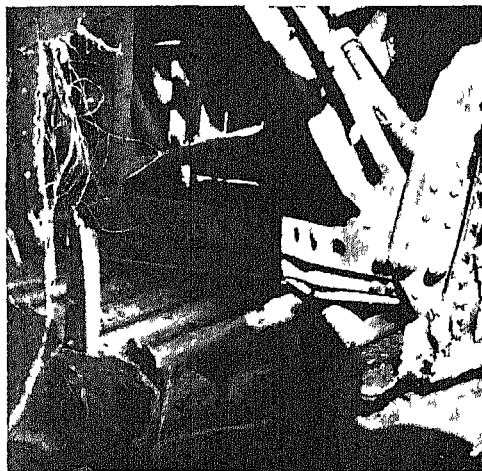
#### NAVIGATOR'S COMPARTMENT

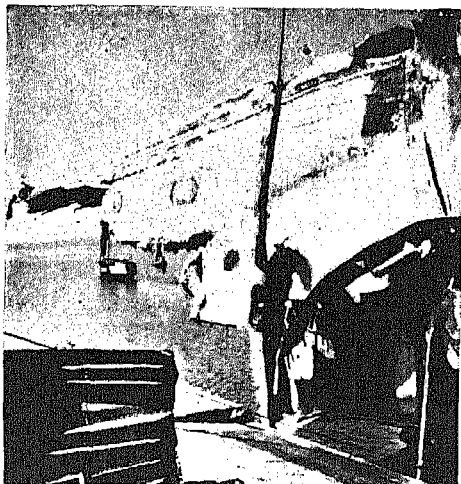
Karnik was standing at left while Pathak was sitting at right



#### RIGHT HAND WHEEL WELL

Here the time bomb was placed

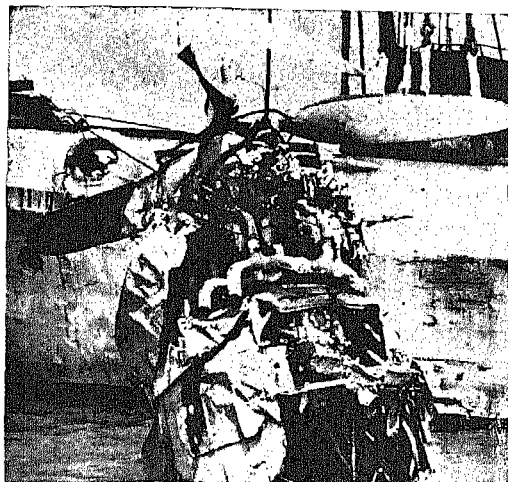




SALVAGED RIGHT HAND WING OF THE KASHMIR PRINCESS



ONE OF THE ENGINES OF THE KASHMIR PRINCESS  
It faithfully worked until the crash





A SHARK CAUGHT AT THE SITE OF CRASH



PART OF THE CLOCK MECHANISM OF THE TIME BOMB





CAPTAIN D. K. JATAR



MISS GLORIA BERRY



MR. K. I. D'CUNHA—Flight Engineer



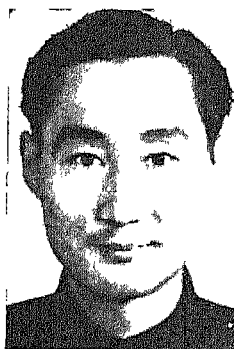
MR. G. D'SOUZA—Purser



MR. J. J. PIMENTA—Purser



MR. SHIH CHIH-ANG



MR. LI CHAO-CHI



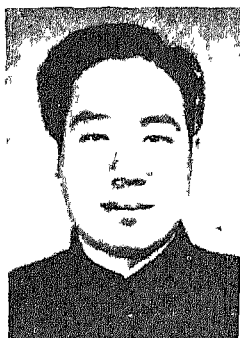
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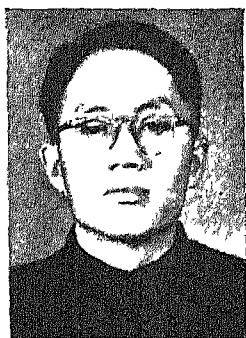
MR. SHEN CHIEN-TU



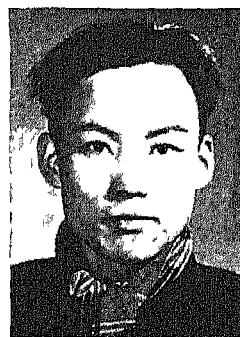
MR. WANG TSO-MEI



MR. TU HUNG



MR LI PING



MR. HAI FENG-KO

## The Life and Death of a Princess

“**H**OW DID the sharks spare you?”, was the first question put to us as soon as we stepped aboard the *Taype*, the cargo vessel which we boarded at Natuna Islands. And again, during conversation on H. M. S. *Dampier*, one of the officers with great astonishment observed, “It is hard to imagine how you got away from the sharks. And, my God ! the sharks are not half as fierce as the barracudas. The barracudas terrorise even the sharks.”

I remember that I wryly smiled on both the occasions.

The South China Sea in which we spent eight agonizing hours holds many a terror. Unexpected storms toss the boats ; below this surface-fury lies the terror of man-eating sharks and barracudas. The air above may seem free from any such treachery, but one never knows when there may be a storm or a sudden cloudburst.

When I scan the photographs taken during the salvaging operations of the *Kashmir Princess*, the most arresting and terrifying one is that of a giant-sized shark being fished out on a large hook. It sends a shiver down my spine whenever I think that this one or a similar monster could well have been around us. Equally astounding are other pictures : the fuselage (the section of the aircraft which seats the passengers and the crew) smashed and shattered to smithereens ; strong steel and aluminium alloy parts torn, twisted, burnt and bashed ; precision-

## KASHMIR PRINCESS

built pipes and cables burnt out of shape ; in short, what once was an engineering masterpiece now turned into a tangled mass of metal. Yet three frail human beings escaped with minor injuries !

But if I am to tell you this story, I must begin from the beginning. Perhaps I should even introduce myself and the "Princess."

My name is Anant Shridhar Karnik. I was 30 when the *Kashmir Princess* exploded. By profession I am what is known as an Aircraft Maintenance Engineer—or A.M.E.—and I work for our national airline, Air-India International.

We, A.M.E.'s, are groundsmen, we don't actually fly the planes, and for that reason some people have a tendency to look down upon us. But the really good pilots—and my friend the late Captain Jatar was one of them—know that it is the humble and unglamorous ground-engineer who makes it possible for them to fly their aircraft with any amount of safety and precision. I have always had the feeling that the engineers perform a very important and vital function in the smooth running of an airline. You may say that we are the doctors—or, rather, the nursemaids, and the aircraft is our Baby ! We certainly are devoted to the planes entrusted to our care and which we check and re-check, and whenever necessary repair and overhaul, before we permit any of them to take to the air. We are ground engineers, but we are not permanently grounded. Often enough we find ourselves in the air—*on duty*, not on a joy-ride ! Whenever our planes go on unscheduled flights, they always carry an A.M.E.—which means one of us—and that's how destiny willed that on that afternoon of 11th April 1955 I should be aboard the ill-fated *Kashmir Princess*.

## THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A PRINCESS

She was christened *Kashmir Princess* but she was born in far-away California. A stone's throw from the glamorous world of Hollywood, the town of Burbank is famous all over the world for its two products—the films produced at Warner Brothers' Burbank Studios and the Constellations and Super-Constellations manufactured at the Lockheed aircraft plant.

Eighteen months of labour go into the making of a single Constellation. Hundreds of aircraft designers, draftsmen, engineers, mechanics, welders, electricians, and other skilled workers, men and women, sweated at high pressure to produce the sleek-bodied aircraft with the maker's serial No. 2666, the Lockheed Constellation L-749 A, which was given the registration marking VT-DEP and the romantic name *Kashmir Princess* when it was bought by Air-India International.

I was one of the team of Air-India International engineers and pilots which was sent to Lockheed's plant in California to acquire one of the Super-Constellations for the A.I.I.'s inter-continental service.

So when I think of the *Kashmir Princess*, I also remember her birth place, the gigantic Lockheed establishment, where 38,000 men and women work to produce the Constellations and Super-Constellations; I remember the ingenious and intricate processes which must be gone through for eighteen months before a plane like the *Kashmir Princess* comes off the assembly line.

I remember the Lockheed's research laboratory which carries out its work in strict seclusion, where except the research engineers everyone else is barred admission. Here a giant rotating fan, as big as a room, hurtles air at very high speed. In this high-speed air-

## KASHMIR PRINCESS

stream is placed an airplane model reduced in correct proportions to the airplane envisaged. The behaviour of this model airplane is studied minutely by engineers under varying simulated flight conditions. It may take as much as six months before sufficient data is passed on to the design Engineers. Besides such tests on a basic airplane model, there is always a new problem some airplanes have experienced which must be fully investigated and remedial solution sought. Such problems are constantly pouring in. These solutions are supplied to the airline concerned and also circulated to airlines the world over. This is known as service after sales.

I remember the Design Office where as many as two hundred Aeronautical Engineers are constantly busy poring over drawing boards calculating with slide rules and then drafting a thousand odd parts with the greatest precision which, when assembled together, would form a luxurious million-dollar airliner.

A large number of women share in the manufacture of these giant skyliners. Apart from most of the stenographers, secretaries and other office staff, scores of women drive small traction units, distributing smaller parts of the aeroplane to various sub-assembly plants. Some of these traction units are like scooters with side-cars. All of a sudden you may find one shoot past you, driven by a girl wearing a scarf around her head to keep her hair from flying.

The electrical wiring section is almost entirely dominated by women. Here on silhouetted diagrams they skilfully place the required thickness and length of wires ready to be assembled in an airplane as wire bundles. Also I remember seeing girls doing rivetting, cutting metal and other manual jobs at the Lockheeds. More than half the staff at Lockheed-canteens is women.

## THE LIFE AND DEATH OF A PRINCESS

Working on a complicated machine requires precise knowledge of each of its working parts. One wrong step during installation or adjustment of an item would sometimes mean damage worth thousands of rupees, or delay in scheduled departure. To prevent this, men selected for working on Constellations must undergo special training. Lockheed maintains a well-established school conducted by a score of expert Instructors. Instructions are made more effective with the aid of a number of simplified working models, and in some cases large fullscale models of aircraft components. I can never forget Doc (Everette) Eyre pointing to a switch on the propeller diagram saying "This is the Cadillac feature of the propeller system." His Cadillac, he considered, a treasured possession.

All this comes to my mind as I sit down to write about the disaster, for that is where and how the *Kashmir Princess* was born. From California she travelled to India via New York and London. During her four years of service with Air-India International she flew about 30 million miles in her flying time of 11,163 hours. She carried on her silver wings thousands of Indians and Foreigners—students, scientists, businessmen, Government Officials, technicians, writers, artists, statesmen and, more than once, our beloved Prime Minister on his noble errands of Peace and Unity of Mankind. And those who put that ghastly time-bomb in the wheel-well were responsible not only for the murder of the Indian crew and the Chinese, Viet Nameese and Austrian and Polish passengers, but also for the wanton destruction of what was once the finest product of American aeronautical engineering and the highly skilled labour of thousands of American men and women.

Only a day before the *Kashmir Princess* embarked on her last fateful flight, I was informed that I must go with her all the way to Jakarta. I was not particularly

## KASHMIR PRINCESS

happy at the prospect because it meant a long and tiring journey. That's what I wrote to my *fiancée*, Kamal, in Rewa in a letter that I posted a minute before the departure of the plane. She was naturally much in my thoughts at that time for we were due to be married the following month, and, in fact, Kamal's mother and sister came to see me off at the airport to confirm the date of the marriage which was fixed for 19th May. No, I was not very enthusiastic about going on that flight. But later I felt happy and excited when I learnt that from Hong Kong we would be flying a Chinese delegation to the Bandung Conference and that amongst the delegates would be Mr. Chou En-Lai. I had a feeling that I would be flying on a historical mission. I did not know that it would turn out to be almost a rendezvous with Death.

## Bombay to Hong Kong

**A**PRIL 10, 1955. It was like any other day of Bombay summer ; sunny, bright and warm. After an early lunch I came to Santa Cruz aerodrome. There I learnt that the *Kashmir Princess* would be delayed for about two hours, as the routine checks were not completed. I was a little piqued at this. According to the original schedule we would have reached Jakarta late in the evening the next day, and leave the following morning. Any delay would reduce the prospects of sufficient rest for me. This concerned me most because I was going on to Jakarta right through with the changed crew that would take over at Bangkok.

A little while after take-off I went to the cockpit. "Well, Karnik," asked Commander Neeves, "how far are you going ? Bangkok, I suppose !" "I wish it was Bangkok," I replied. "I am going right upto Jakarta."

"You are a lucky man. The Prime Minister of China will be on board," said Co-pilot Godbole. Was I thrilled ? And how immensely !

After a brief halt at Calcutta we took off for Bangkok. As the passengers were finding seats, the Air-Hostess began her usual polite speech of welcome, "May I have your kind attention, please ? Air-India International welcomes you on board the *Kashmir Princess* . . . ." etc., etc. It was all too familiar to me.

'Then, as we taxied across the runway, came her voice again. This time it was the life-jacket announcement.

## KASHMIR PRINCESS

This, too, I must have heard hundreds of times so that I knew it almost by heart. I could hear every word of what she said without straining my ears at all.

"May I have your attention, please? As Life Boat Drill is a normal routine on board ship, we would like to show you how to use a life-jacket in the unlikely event of an emergency landing on water. . . ." And, as each of the two Flight Purser took hold of a life-jacket to demonstrate, the voice of the Air-Hostess droned on, "Your life-jacket is within reach, is easily put on, secured and can be inflated automatically by pulling a toggle. A mouth piece is provided as an additional device for inflation. It is important to remember that life-jackets should not be inflated until you are clear off the aircraft." Then the reassuring phrase, "This demonstration is a normal procedure" and the final "Thank you." Then the loud-speaker was switched off, the Flight Purser replaced the life-jackets on the racks, and I said to myself, "Thank Heavens, it's over now and I can have a bit of sleep."

We landed at Bangkok in the early hours of April 11th. I was walking along the corridor of the Donmuang airport terminal building towards the restaurant. Capt. Jatar, handsome and well-groomed as ever, wearing a warm, pleasant smile, intercepted me. In his uniform, with four gold stripes on each arm and shoulder, he looked elegant. "Ah, here is a Commander," I said to myself. I was glad to know that he was to take the *Kashmir Princess* from Bangkok to Jakarta. "Is the aircraft all right?" asked Capt. Jatar. "Perfect," I replied and proceeded to the restaurant.

As I was having my breakfast, I heard some one call, "Hallo, Karnik." I turned round and saw my old friend

## BOMBAY TO HONG KONG

Capt. Dikshit. "See you in the aircraft," said he and hurriedly left the restaurant. When I returned to the aircraft I found that D'Cunha had just finished his checks and we exchanged greetings.

Bangkok to Hong Kong was a four hour's flight. I spent most of the time trying to sleep in the passenger cabin. The weather was fine, the airplane perfect and the crew fresh. Hence I did not take the trouble to go to the cockpit on this lap. Usually an engineer's company is welcome in the cockpit, as casual talks relieve some of the tired feeling and boredom on the part of the crew members.

We reached Hong Kong in the early afternoon. The weather was bright and cloudless. Fine weather is a blessing at this airport which is one of the most treacherous airports in the world. It is situated at the base of high hills which encircle three-fourths of the circumference of the airport, the remaining side being open to the sea. This airport allows no mistakes, either on the part of the pilot or the engineer. An inch of wrong application of a control, the slightest error in touching down the short runway or the engines not responding to the required power, should any of these things occur at landing or take off, the result could be disastrous. Hong Kong airport calls for extra skill on the part of the pilots as well as the engineers. As I had been to Hong Kong several times, the novelty of watching the tense landing or take-off was no more there, but the thrill remained just the same, as exciting as a flying trapeze act.

Hong Kong is a very picturesque city, clean and modern. As the airplane took a circuit along the airport, the water-ways were seen thronged with hurrying motor-boats of various sizes and shapes; ships anchored in sheer idleness, lazily puffing away curling smoke rings,

## KASHMIR PRINCESS

wondering at the scurrying multitude of rushing diminutives like mighty elephants watching busy little ants with lazy curiosity. Amongst these hurrying crowds one saw occasionally, a broad-sailed Chinese junk sliding majestically with an indifferent air, paying no heed to the scramble for distance, nor to the curious, lazy glances of the mighty ocean-trodders. As this scene rapidly slid off below, the lovely Hong Kong hill appeared as if woken up from a sleep. Tall, white buildings stood over it with the gesture of magnificent statues. A stray cloud from here and there touched its peak, hung for a while and moved further on, reminding me of a fastidious lady trying a variety of hats. As one watches these enthralling scenes and gets a little dizzy in contemplating them, the swiftly moving airplane wakes one up with a sudden jolt to the grim reality just before landing. The wings of the airplane appear to be skimming the hill tops, the wing-tips rocking slightly and one prays that the wing may not tilt too far or it might hit the rocks. The heart beats faster ; hands clasp tightly the edges of the chair. Below now pass very rapidly the busy streets, with hurrying buses and cars, and a multitude of people. Suddenly the bright gray runway appears, flying past behind the airplane. After a hundred yards or so have been crossed, one begins to hope that the airplane may touch down soon for the remainder of the runway appears too short and the lofty hills too close ahead. Then as the airplane touches ground and slows down, many a sigh of relief can be heard from the passengers and the crew. The big airplane proudly rolls to the parking place with an air of supremacy. The lofty blue hills appear to be smiling, as if saying to themselves "How we scared these puny little men in the airplane."

After the passengers disembarked the crew of the *Kashmir Princess* stepped out and looked at the

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defiant, stubborn hills as if to say : "Ah, you can't stop us."

This was the end of our scheduled flight but not yet the 'journey's end' for us and for our 'princess.' Soon we must take off on a chartered flight to Jakarta, carrying the Chinese delegation.

I set about my work vigorously, checking the hundred and one mechanical details of the plane. The *Kashmir Princess* had done a splendid job flying from Bombay to Hong Kong without developing any defects, and I felt proud of it. After about an hour or so, the engines would be called upon to bear the toughest burden of the flight, the take-off from a very short runway facing tall hills ; it would be a trying test for the power of the engines, and the skill of the pilot.

Immediately after the airplane stopped, a number of workers of the Hong Kong Aircraft Engineering Corporation—mostly local Chinese—thronged around, some checking the engines, oil levels, some attending to the refuelling, and most of them wiping the spilled oil from the engine exterior. The red and yellow petrol 'bowser' rolled in front of the airplane. Smartly attired Chinese workers laid out the pipes and with meticulous precision started refuelling the *Kashmir Princess* for her non-stop flight to Jakarta. D'Cunha stood on the wing supervising the refuelling. And both of us had to go without lunch . . .

While I was checking the engines for oil leaks etc., and D'Cunha supervising the refuelling, the rest of the crew were having their lunch in the airport restaurant.

In an airport restaurant, airline crew members always have a separately reserved table, so that they may have their meals in peace, in seclusion—undisturbed by curious passengers and inquisitive strangers. This seclusion and

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peaceful meal is essential as the crew have to be on the alert all the time during the flight.

On the afternoon of 11th April 1955, the *Kashmir Princess* was the only aircraft then to leave Hong Kong on its chartered flight, carrying eleven passengers. The airport restaurant therefore was anything but crowded. The delegates had just arrived and they had the distinctive air of diplomats. Each of them carried a bulky brief case obviously filled with documents of momentous import. Though all of them looked like diplomats, suave in appearance and smartly attired, none of them had the dignified figure and the arresting personality of Chou En-lai, the Prime Minister of China. Advance news had indicated that H. E. Chou En-lai would be one of the passengers on the chartered flight. The *Kashmir Princess* crew though engrossed in discussing the plans for the impending flight could not fail to note the conspicuous absence of the Chinese Prime Minister. But the topic was not discussed further as airline crew is trained in discretion to strictly avoid any discussion of personalities on board an aircraft. Their business is to fly whoever is on board and to whatever destination.

An excellent meal was served out and with it the attention of the crew was switched to the pleasant fare before them. The weather was fine and it promised a comfortable flight. Everything was well with the world—or was it?

Just then a young man walked up to the table, pulled a chair, and established himself comfortably upon it with dramatic suddenness. He did not care either to introduce himself nor did he think it necessary to seek permission to join the group without being invited to. His non-chalant manner indicated as if he took it for granted that the seat

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was reserved for him or as if he did not care for whom the seat was reserved. From his appearance he looked like a Westerner. Without awaiting any questions from any of the crew members, he said in an accent typical of the American, with a forced smile, "Aren't you flying a Chinese delegation to Bandung?"

The crew were perturbed at the liberties this stranger was taking. All eyebrows were raised to convey resentment at his intrusion. He did not receive any reply to his first question. But he was too thick-skinned to take notice of such undisguised disapproval. Turning to Capt. Dikshit, he continued, "Aren't these chinks very secretive? They don't tell you nothing. Ain't I right?" And he grinned.

Capt. Dikshit did not like the stranger's reference to the Chinese as 'Chinks.' He appeared to be outwardly cool, but was shimmering with suppressed rage. "I don't know," he replied.

Undaunted by this cold-shouldering from Capt. Dikshit, he turned to Pathak, the Navigator. "Ah," the stranger said, "I am sure you will be taking off pretty soon." "In an hour or so," casually replied the navigator, secure in the knowledge that he was not divulging any secret.

The entire crew were getting exasperated by the stranger's persistence. He seemed determined to continue his endless questioning, "When will you reach Jakarta?" he went on blandly.

However much the crew may resent such obstinate queries, they are never uncivil to anyone. In keeping with this tradition Pathak replied vaguely "Sometime in

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the evening” and looked at Capt. Jatar, whose look conveyed he should not vouchsafe any further information to this interloper from nowhere.

At this moment an Air-India employee from the Traffic Department came up to Capt. Jatar and informed him that the passengers’ luggage had been loaded, the aircraft refuelled and ready for the flight. “Fast work,” exclaimed Capt. Jatar. “No customs examination for the delegates who are diplomats, Sir,” said the Traffic personnel.

On hearing the announcement by the Traffic personnel, the stranger shot out of his chair and darted out of the restaurant as abruptly and unceremoniously as he had joined the group at the table. Capt. Jatar saw the receding figure of the stranger in the exit of the restaurant and said, “Some inquisitive journalist, I presume. What a bore!” At which Dikshit remarked, “I didn’t like him any way.” Capt. Jatar said, “Nor did I. Dikshit, you get on with your cockpit pre-flight checks. Pathak, let us go to the A. T. C. (Air Traffic Control) for briefing and weather reports. Weather will be clear, I guess.” With these words Capt. Jatar rose, followed by the rest of the crew. Capt. Jatar and Navigator Pathak went to the Air Traffic Control Building. Capt. Dikshit, Gloria Berry, D’Souza and Pimenta went to the aircraft. Dikshit went into the cockpit for the pre-flight checks. Gloria, D’Souza and Pimenta went into the cabin to check that sufficient food was kept in the galley compartment and that the interior arrangement in the cabin was in perfect trim.

In the midst of the routine check-up of the airplane, someone brought a message from the Air-Hostess that my suit-case was missing from the cabin and that perhaps

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someone had removed it with the luggage of the passengers who had de-planed at Hong Kong. Being unable to leave my work, I requested one of the officials to look for my suit-case and continued the check-up uninterrupted. While I was busy with my work, one of Air-India's Officials at Hong Kong interrupted me saying, "Karnik, keep an eye on strangers around here. You see, Chinese Government officials are being carried and there is a possibility of sabotage." "Look you," I said, "How do you expect me to find strangers here. I am a stranger myself in Hong Kong. It is a job for Police and Security." We talked no further. When I had finished my work, D'Cunha came to me with a bewildered look and said that he was going to the terminal building to look for his suit-case which was also removed by some one from the airplane. I joined him as I wanted to go to the toilet in the same building. We separated at the entrance. I returned to the airplane after ten minutes and found that all the crew and the passengers had taken their seats. I rushed into the aircraft and before taking my seat checked up that my suit-case was already on board. It had come back as mysteriously as it had disappeared.

Passing through the rear cabin, I had only a fleeting glimpse of the eleven passengers but I noticed that most of them were Chinese with just a couple of Europeans. The front cabin being completely empty, I decided to take a seat there and to catch up on my previous night's sleep.

As the Constellation started rolling towards the take-off point, the pleasant voice of Gloria Berry came through the loud speaker. Such an announcement is routine and, often, boring business but her warm human voice seemed to invest the commonplace details with dramatic significance.

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"Good afternoon, Gentlemen," she said, omitting the standard formula of 'ladies and gentlemen,' for she was herself the only lady on board the aircraft, "Air-India International welcomes you aboard the *Kashmir Princess*. The Local Time is 12 : 02 and we are about to take-off for Jakarta. Will passengers kindly fasten their seat belts and observe the No Smoking sign? . . . ." Mechanically, I adjusted the seat belt, as she went on to announce that the distance of 1960 miles to Jakarta would be covered in approximately 7 hours, 30 minutes, that we would fly at an altitude of 18,000 feet and that afternoon tea would be served in flight. Then came the words which were also part of the routine announcement but which, still echo in my ears. . . .

"Your Flight Pursers D'Souza and Pimenta and your Air-Hostess Miss Gloria Berry are at your service. Please do not hesitate to call on us for any assistance or refreshments you may require."

"On behalf of Captain Jatar and his crew, may I wish you a comfortable and pleasant journey to your destination. Thank you."

As she spoke those words, did the gay and vivacious Gloria have the slightest foreboding of the tragedy that would overtake her and the passengers in her charge and Captain Jatar and his crew, within about five hours of this announcement? Did she know that she who was once taken to be the **KASHMIR PRINCESS** would end her life along with the airplane of that name?

Gloria had been crowned the **KASHMIR PRINCESS** by the Singapore newspapers. On the 6th July, 1954, less than a year ago, Air-India International inaugurated their first service to Singapore. The inauguration of this

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service was a special news item in the local papers of Singapore. The news further added that the inaugural flight would be made by the *Kashmir Princess*. A large crowd had gathered at the airport to watch the arrival of the airliner. A few amongst them expected to see a princess from Kashmir and not merely the *Kashmir Princess*.

When the Constellation airplane came to a halt in the brilliantly tropical sunlight and all the passengers disembarked the liner, pretty Gloria stepped out majestically with a faint smile on her lips. The crowd hailed her as the KASHMIR PRINCESS. News-cameramen clicked their cameras! and her photograph was prominently displayed with the title "KASHMIR PRINCESS." The sobriquet stuck on, and quite deservedly too.

All Air-Hostesses have a reputation for being hard working and conscientious. 23-year old Gloria in addition loved her vocation. There was excitement and thrill in seeing various places on the globe; the massive and magnificent cities, the historic monuments like the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey, The Eiffel Tower, the glory that was Greece and the grandeur that was Rome. Gloria was exhilarated by all this and longed to see much more. This was a priceless education, she thought. Travelling and meeting people from different parts of the world, Europe, America, Japan, Russia, China etc., and people from different walks of life—doctors, scientists, artists, sculptors, musicians, film stars—widens the horizons of the mind and enlarges the boundaries of one's consciousness. Travel, in itself is a liberal education, far more valuable than the college education she had missed.

She loved the graceful and luxurious Constellation. She felt happy only when each and every one of the passengers in her care was perfectly at home in an

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airplane. And this was not difficult on an airplane like the Constellation which has all passenger amenities which an efficient Air-Hostess like Gloria made readily available to the passengers. Their satisfaction was her reward. After the Singapore inaugural flight she had developed a particular attachment to this airplane the *Kashmir Princess* as, because of it, the enviable title had been bestowed on her.

Gloria went on with the announcement :

“May I have your attention please !”

As Gloria’s voice again came over the loud-speakers, I knew what was coming. The life-jacket announcement and demonstration ! The old, old boring business all over again. I continued to look out of the window at the green hills surrounding the airfield as the engines whirled and throbbed in preparation for the imminent take-off.

“As Life Boat Drill is a normal routine on board ship, we would like to show you how to use a life-jacket in the unlikely event of an emergency landing on water. . . .”

Just then I turned in from the window and was amused to find young D’Souza, the youngest member of the crew looking smart in his purser’s uniform, taking the yellow life-jacket from the rack to demonstrate it for my sole benefit, while his colleague Pimenta went through the routine in the other cabin for the passengers.

“D’Souza,” I said, “if you go through the whole business of demonstrating it for me too, I will scream.”

He smiled his shy, youthful smile, and conscientiously carried on with the demonstration. Being the only passenger in that cabin I felt it would be too rude to look

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out while poor D'Souza went through the life-jacket drill. So I decided, though under protest, to give my undivided attention to watching the demonstration which I had seen at least fifty times before. Looking back on it, I feel that I owe my life to that decision—and to Gloria and D'Souza.

There was perfect well-rehearsed synchronization of Gloria's voice and D'Souza's movements. As she said "Your life-jacket is easily put on," he opened it and with slow, explanatory movements, put it on and tied the tapes, and pointed to the toggle and the mouthpiece as she went on, "... can be inflated automatically by pulling a toggle. A mouthpiece is provided as an additional device for inflation. It is important to remember that life-jacket should not be inflated until you are clear off the aircraft." Then the final, reassuring "This demonstration is a normal procedure. Thank you. . . ."

After the life-jacket announcement, Gloria sat down on the small seat near the entrance door. Until the take-off was completed, she had to sit there. Her mind fell into a pleasant reverie of her school days at Cathedral and John High School in Bombay; her early music lessons. She was passionately fond of music. At the age of 14 she had passed the Pianoforte Higher Local examination of the Trinity College of Music. Perhaps she could have become a musician and given piano recitals the world over. But the lure of the flying career was too powerful to have been subdued by any other attractive vocation. While she reflected on variety of the other careers she could have chosen and her ultimate choice, she looked at the beautiful little wrist watch for the actual time of take-off. Her face flushed a little and her lips parted with a modest smile, for she saw in the watch not only the time but the handsome face of her *fiancé* from whom the watch was a treasured present.

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And just then I felt the pull on the mighty Constellation as engine power was applied, and the aircraft started moving forward towards the hill in the front.

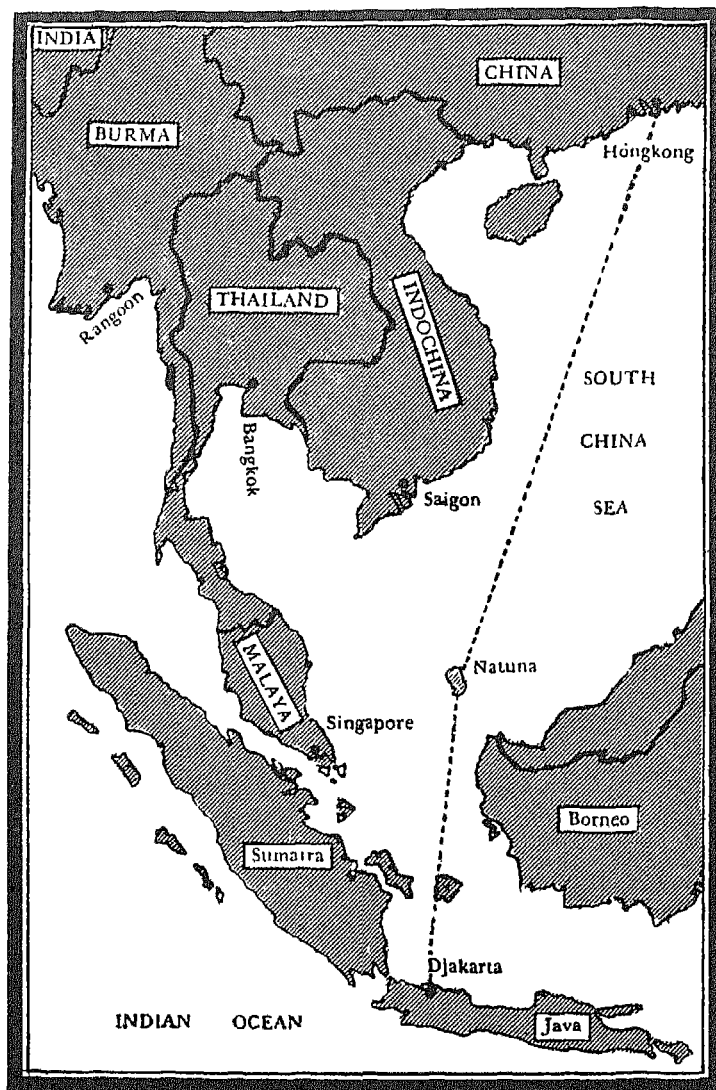
## NEWS FLASH

NEW DELHI, *March 31, 1955*

PRIME MINISTER Jawaharlal Nehru, speaking in Parliament, described the forthcoming Bandung Conference of Asian and African nations as a unique one and of historic importance. "It is a coming together of Asian and African countries who aim at two things—peace and opportunity for progress."

NEW DELHI, *April 3, 1955*

THE COUNTRIES invited to the Bandung Conference include Afghanistan, Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, Egypt, Ethiopia, the Gold Coast, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Jordan, Laos, Lebanon, Liberia, Lybia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, South Viet Nam, North Viet Nam and Peoples' Republic of China, representing more than half the population of the world. Among the powers not invited are Australia, New Zealand and Chiang Kai Sheik's Formosa.



Air-route: Hong Kong to Jakarta

## Hong Kong to . . . .

THE SUN was bright, with a deep blue sky, and the challenging deeper blue hills seemed to have a tight-lipped smile. The airplane looked small in the mighty perspective of the gigantic hills, but definitely the engines of the *Kashmir Princess* roared aloud as the airplane, barely half-way across the runway, got off the ground. Capt. Jatar gently pulled her away from the hills towards the open gap over the sea. Involuntarily I said to myself, "Here is a first-class pilot." Hong Kong is one airport where one can recognize the quality of a pilot from his characteristic take-off.

The *Kashmir Princess* circled over Hong Kong City—the gay, varied array of swift life could be seen passing below. Now the Princess was set on her course, straight for Jakarta, a non-stop flight of seven and a half hours.

Seven and a half hours is a long time in flight and a long distance to traverse. What concerned me most was the short time available for rest at Jakarta. Next day early morning we were to start on our journey homewards. In this lap of flight, I had to snatch as much sleep as was possible. However, sleep was difficult due to noise and vibrations.

Listlessly I sat all alone in the tourist compartment (normally 36 persons occupy this compartment) with a gaze that silently proclaimed, "I am the monarch of all I survey." Fortunately I surveyed too little—only

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the tourist compartment. Drowsiness slowly crept over me as a result of the previous night's sleeplessness. I sat vacantly gazing in front of me, paying no heed to the low-voiced gay chatter of the passengers in the rear compartment, the constant monotonous drone of the engines, and the swiftly running faithful second-hand of the watch. The *Kashmir Princess* was smoothly sailing through cloudless skies, every limb of it working perfectly, as if effortlessly. Being unable to sleep I picked up a few pictorial magazines to keep my mind occupied.

Gloria Berry was constantly rushing to the rear passenger compartment with refreshments and drinks. Occasionally D'Souza and Pimenta took trays with soft drinks or cigarette tins for the passengers.

I rose from my seat to go to the toilet in the rear and saw Capt. Jatar returning from the rear, going towards the cockpit. As he came near me, he gave me a pleasant friendly smile, probably saw sleepiness written all over my face, said nothing and proceeded to his duty post. I went to the toilet and had a brisk wash. I then went to the crew compartment to have some snacks, as at Hong Kong I was unable to have my lunch. Here I found Capt. Dikshit, Pimenta and D'Souza engaged in a casual friendly talk. I joined their group. Capt. Jatar was at the controls and D'Cunha busy with his logs, keeping a watch on engine temperatures and pressures. Flight Navigator Pathak was busy with his charts, informing the Captain about the landmarks on the route to be followed to Jakarta.

D'Souza left us for a couple of minutes and returned with steaming freshly-brewed tea for all of us. I forgot all about snacks and pounced on a cup. Tea is my weakness. Any time is tea-time for me. This one—freshly brewed—was delicious. Hunger temporarily subsided.

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After sipping his tea, Dikshit pulled out his 'Contaflex' camera lately purchased during his recent continental tour. A delightful little camera of exquisite beauty and design. He opened it, pulled out the exposed roll, and while inserting an unexposed one asked me,

"Well, Karnik, what's *your* Camera ? "

"Super-Ikonta," I said.

"Let us have a look," Dikshit said, "If it is not in the baggage compartment, bring it over here." "Certainly it is not in the baggage compartment," I said whimsically "Yet I can't bring it here." Perplexed, he enquired "Why not ? "

If a joke is stretched too far it could be lost. So I replied, "What's the use of a camera on this trip? We will reach Jakarta late in the evening, and have to leave next morning. It would have been a useless burden. I never increase the pay-load of an aeroplane even by a few ounces."

Dikshit tossed the exposed spool in the hand and chuckled, "I have got some of my nicest Bangkok pictures in this. I am very anxious to see the results." Then he explained the presence of his camera. The crew was stationed in Bangkok for a week and was expected to return to Bombay from Jakarta. He complimented me for being thoughtful enough not to bring my camera with me. To this I replied, "My only concern in Jakarta is to snatch maximum of sleep. You see, I can't sleep in an airplane."

"You are an optimist," Dikshit said with a concealed smile, "to think you are going to sleep in Jakarta." "Op-

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timist, yes, that's me" said I, "I don't see why I can't have my full sleep in Jakarta. After all our little mighty *Princess* is so kind—I mean in perfect order. I would hardly have any work in Jakarta."

"Mr. Karnik, are you aware of the Bandung Conference?", chuckled Dikshit, "We are not likely to find accommodation in hotels in Jakarta. So the tentative plan is, after leaving the delegates in Jakarta, to fly to Singapore for your worthy little sleep—Well, let us see—yes, you will have a good four hours' sleep, provided, of course, your little *Princess* does not behave naughty."

"My good Lord," I exclaimed, "in that case what am I doing here? Let me go to the cabin and snatch a few moments of sleep."

Leaving the jolly lot to themselves, I went to the cabin and sat down in all earnestness to go to sleep. But alas, try as I would, sleep I could not. Once again I took refuge in the pictorials.

Some hours had passed since we left Hong Kong. Gloria Berry found a few moments to relax, occupied a chair next to mine. We talked naturally quite a few things about our other trips.

It was very curious, I reflect now, that we both were sailing in the same boat. We both were engaged for nearly a year and both of us were looking forward to our respective marriages in the near future. During the inaugural flight to Singapore, I had bought a watch for my *fiancée*, and her *fiancé* had asked her to buy one for herself. Then I asked her how her watch was working. She said that she cherished that little piece of ingenious beauty, and enquired about the one I bought for my *fiancée*.

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"No complaints," I casually replied.

For a little while Gloria Berry sat silent with wide open eyes, staring fixedly at nothing. I took for granted that she must have been tired. Suddenly she turned round and said, "I don't like to fly on these V.I.P. charters, I feel such flights are risky from security point of view."

"Nothing to worry, I can assure you," said I, not weighing her fear lightly. It was as if she had a premonition of the approaching disaster. I kept wondering at her remarks, and when I turned round I found that she had already left the seat.

Meanwhile, the *Kashmir Princess* was faithfully following the route, every minute getting nearer to Jakarta. It was nearly five hours since we had left Hong Kong. Now I became aware of the cry for food from my stomach. I went to the galley and picked up two sandwiches, one cake, one plantain and poured myself a cup of coffee. This modest meal I took to the cockpit and settled myself at the vacant radio-officer's table. Whilst chatting to D'Cunha, who was nearest, I began relishing the scanty meal. I never cared much for meat-sandwiches and barely could eat half. The cake, being subjected to confined air, tasted stale. After a single bite this too was discarded. I relished in full the plantain and the cup of coffee. After the meal was over and the stomach quietened somewhat, a little drowsiness crept over me. Taking leave of D'Cunha and promising to return to the cockpit after about an hour, I rose to return to the cabin to submit myself to sleep. I gave a final glance to all the instruments just to be sure that every thing was in order.

I returned to the cabin, removed my shoes and with legs outstretched was soon asleep.

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Though I went to sleep, alertness in the cockpit and low voiced chatter amongst the passengers in the cabin continued.

D'Souza and Pimenta politely went round asking "Would you like to have some whisky and soda or gin, Sir?" They had expected that these revolutionaries from New China would naturally be discreet in their choice of drinks and especially when drinks were not prohibited in their country. They were surprised that no one expressed a preference for whisky and soda or gin but instead asked only for orange and lemon squashes.

Another surprise awaited D'Souza and Pimenta when they brought the squashes for the delegates. The Chinese refused English and American cigarettes. They preferred cigarettes made in their own country and carried with them an abundant stock of the same.

Meanwhile Gloria took the passenger list to check their tickets. She started checking from the rear of the cabin. In a charming low tone she would ask with a smile "May I see your ticket please?"

Li Ping and Shih Chih-Ang were the only two bespectacled young Chinese delegates sitting side by side. The next delegate was Chung Pu-Yun, the eldest of them. There were clear hard lines on his face which showed that this man was toughened by a lot of hard experience. He was talking to Hao Feng-Ko. Perhaps Chung Pu-Yun was relating some of his valuable experience. One by one Gloria checked all the tickets of the Chinese delegates.

The last two persons were Europeans. Since they were also going to Jakarta they must be correspondents. In addition to a bulky brief case each one of them had

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a baby-typewriter placed below his seat. After checking out the Polish correspondent Mr. Strace Jeremi, Gloria turned to elderly Dr. Friedrich Jensen. Since all other passenger tickets were checked out the last one obviously was that of Dr. Jensen the Austrian journalist. Dr. Jensen then was pondering over a thick voluminous book when Gloria's gentle voice interposed, "May I disturb you, Dr. Jensen, for a moment? Could I see your ticket please?" Dr. Jensen was a little astonished that the Air-Hostess should have addressed him by name. Soon his astonishment ebbed as he stole a fleeting glance over the passenger list in Gloria's hand where all but his name were ticked off. The steady confident manner in which Dr. Jensen produced his passenger ticket showed that this man was not just a correspondent. Dr. Friedrich Jensen was a physician, a patriot, a writer and a poet. He had fought against Franco with the International Brigade, had rendered medical assistance to Mao-Tse-Tung's wounded soldiers, had written a first-hand account of the new born China and presented it to the European public, had sung in his poetry the glory of freedom. And now the Bandung assignment was to be his crowning glory. But fate willed it differently.

Gloria went back to the galley to help D'Souza and Pimenta who were busy preparing squashes and tea.

Airline Commanders make it a point to make solicitous inquiries about the comforts of passengers under their care even though Commander Jatar was sure that young Gloria, smart D'Souza and jovial Pimenta would spare no pains to comfort the passengers. A Commander is the Public Relations Officer of an airline whose job is to enquire if the passengers were feeling perfectly at home. Commander Jatar said to Dikshit, "You take over the controls. I will meet the passengers."

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He stepped into the galley and was surprised to see only orange and lemon squash and tea being prepared. He enquired from Gloria "Are'nt they having drinks?" "Only the soft ones, Commander," replied Gloria.

The Commander was astonished at this simplicity from the young revolutionaries of a young nation. He stepped into the cabin to meet the passengers. He saw most of the passengers were busy making notes. Also, he thought only a few could possibly converse in English and it would be best to leave them undisturbed. He decided to go to the lounge in the rearmost part of the cabin. As he passed the passengers, some of them, who were not too busy with their conference papers, looked at him and smiled. In turn he greeted them with his usual genial smile.

I was half awake when I perceived Commander Jatar returning from the lounge towards the cockpit. I felt that in his presence I must not keep sleeping and stood to near attention as best as I could in my semi-conscious state. The Commander put his hand on my shoulder and said in an affectionate manner, "I can see that you need sleep very badly. There is no need for you to keep awake." I was too touched to reply and resumed my sleep undisturbed.

Capt. Jatar, on his way to the cockpit, peered over the chart Navigator Pathak was working on. "Well," he enquired, "What's our position?"

Pathak immediately put his pencil on the chart and said, "We have just crossed the Paracel Islands and are off the Bombay reef."

"Bombay reef!" exclaimed Jatar. "In this part of the world." They both thought it strange that a tiny

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little reef in the South China Sea should have the name of one of the foremost Indian cities.

As Capt. Jatar got himself into his seat, Capt. Dikshit said to him "We just passed a beautiful coral reef. Guess its name?" The Commander smiled and said, "I was with Pathak on the chart just now."

Jatar said to Dikshit, "You may rest for a while." Dikshit was not feeling tired at all. Jatar's company was always an impetus for hard work. Dikshit simply replied, "No, Cap., I will keep the controls. You probably need some rest."

They were silent for a while. When Dikshit turned to the Commander he did not fail to notice that he was strangely preoccupied with something. Dikshit and Jatar had been friends, for a long time. The intimacy existing between them was that of two loving brothers, and that is why he could take liberties to enquire the cause of Capt. Jatar's preoccupation.

"Anything worrying you, Cap.?"

"It's the posting offer in the East."

"It will be hard after the European weather."

"Well, there is small choice. I can have the posting in the winter."

"Then that is perfectly alright."

"Alright in a way. But not quite!"

"I don't understand."

## KASHMIR PRINCESS

"Dickie. Don't you see that I will be far away from my chums." Jatar said and then continued, "Why don't you also take a posting to the East with me? . . . .

. . . . If you are there then it will be perfect."

"You know D. K. (Capt. Jatar's initials) my family responsibilities. I don't think it will be possible for me to join you on the posting."

"Dickie, please do consider it for my sake."

"I will think it over when we get back. I will consider it my privilege to fly with you *Commander*."

Pathak came into cockpit to report the aircraft position to Capt. Jatar and handed in the new course card, and said, "Captain, we will be over the Natuna Islands in nineteen minutes." Capt. Jatar handed over the course card to Capt. Dikshit who readjusted the automatic pilot trimmer controls to the course indicated and knew that in about fifteen minutes the position report must be sent.

While Dikshit was busy adjusting the course of the 107,000 lbs. plane by finger touch controls of the automatic pilot system, Jatar was relaxing and his thoughts must have relegated back to his early training days. He might have remembered the hot discussion that took place in the family when he declared that he wanted to become an airline pilot. He was well aware of the risks involved. When the mention of the risks was made by his parents he had replied, "Since death is inevitable I rather wish it to be in an airplane rather than in a bed through sickness." His parents had to give in to his firm determination.

He remembered his first solo flight. His instructor

had patted him lightly and had said, "My boy, I know that flying is to you what walking is to others." As Jatar pushed forward the throttle (engine accelerator) and made a smooth take off, he knew that this was only the beginning of greater responsibilities ahead.

How soon the time since his first solo flight till the present one had elapsed, he thought. During his long career of over twenty years he had flown his country's flag to many foreign countries ; flown swiftly and safely noble dignitaries including Hon. Mr. Nehru.

He remembered the numerous hazards he had undergone. Flying was dare-devil business when he was learning it. Now, with the tremendous advance of the aeronautical and allied sciences piloting an airplane is a combination of art plus science. Hazards were now almost reduced to nil, except in case of search and rescue work. He then remembered the *Malabar Princess* lost in the Alps. His friends, Capt. Saint and co-pilot young Korgaonkar were flying it. When the *Malabar Princess* was lost, Jatar along with other foreign search parties, set out for the search. The whole of the Alps then was having very heavy snow-fall. Howling winds raised the snow storms and visibility was very poor. Even when other airplanes returned because of weather obstructions, Jatar with his indomitable courage continued the search for possible survivors. Soon he sighted the wreckage near Mount Blanc and returned with the sad tale. There was no hope of survival of any of the passengers or the crew. Besides loss of his friend Capt. Saint, Jatar thought that India had lost one of the most promising pilots—young Korgaonkar.

Dikshit was at the controls and he spoke to some station on the radio. Capt. Jatar woke up from his reverie, enquired who he was talking to.

"Singapore," said Dikshit. "They are keeping a very close track of our progress."

"You mean that they are plotting us? Why? I wonder!" Jatar said. "May be because we are carrying V. I. P.s (Very Import Personnel)," said Dikshit.

Jatar then turned to D'Cunha, who was intently watching the engine instruments, and asked, "How much is the endurance gas left?" (Gas is short form for gasoline. i.e., petrol). This question meant how many hours more could the airplane fly on the remaining fuel: D'Cunha glanced at the log in front of him, and cross-checked against the instrument reading before replying "Four and a half hour dry tanks, Captain." Jatar had a pleased expression. Only about two and half hours journey was left to be covered before we would be in Jakarta, and be left with two hours of reserve fuel. Every thing was going on as envisaged, smooth and accurate.

Capt. Dikshit picked up the microphone and instantly his calm voice was carried on the air on a frequency tuned to Singapore Control Tower. "Hallo Singapore, this is Victor Echo Papa (Radio call sign for *Kashmir Princess*) calling—position latitude 4° North and longitude 108° East; Height 18,000 feet; Air speed 185 knots indicated (this equals a speed over ground of 280 miles per hour); O.A.T. (outside air temperature) two degrees; Cloudless sky; E.T.A. (Expected Time of Arrival) Jakarta 11-25 Zebra (Greenwich Mean Time)."

We were still too far from Jakarta to contact that airport directly, so Jatar instructed Dikshit to signal Singapore to inform Jakarta that the *Kashmir Princess* would require night-landing facilities. Singapore later confirmed to us that the message had been duly communicated. So far

they were in touch with Bangkok and Singapore. Soon they were within radio range of Jakarta and Capt. Dikshit changed the waveband and tuned to the new frequency.

The voice of the Jakarta operator came loud and clear—he wanted to know if Chou En-Lai was on board the *Kashmir Princess*. Both the pilots knew that the Chinese Premier was not on board. Dikshit after obtaining consent from Commander signalled Jakarta, "Negative."

The very instant Capt. Jatar was checking up on the remaining fuel, Capt. Dikshit had finished reporting position, Miss Berry, D'Souza and Pimenta were taking back the tea cups, the passengers having finished their evening tea. Refreshed after the tea they were all in a relaxed mood ; some of them chatting with each other while others were looking over newspapers and magazines. One of the delegates who spoke English enquired of D'Souza, "What time shall we reach Jakarta ?" This is the commonest question on any flight. D'Souza had no difficulty in answering the question. "At 7-30 local" was the prompt reply as he unconsciously glanced at his watch.

The time, according to the clock (which kept Greenwich Mean Time) was 09:24 GMT. The second hand was moving towards the 25th minute.

At that very moment the thoughts of those on board were in different places. The passengers were thinking of the momentous conference for the Asian Peoples' Unity. Jatar peered out of the window and perceived the clear blue hemisphere above and the calm sea below, thought "Posting at any place is fine if you have friends around," and he glanced at Dikshit. Dikshit thought, "After all, he should join his friend by taking up a similar posting,"

and he thought of his wife and children, particularly of Bharat the eldest son. His education would be a problem. "Well" he thought, "If I should choose to accept a foreign posting, Bharat's education must not suffer. I will send him to a renowned public school." D'Cunha was thinking of the Easter greetings he had sent to his wife and mother. Whilst D'Souza was filled with nostalgic yearning for his wife who would be celebrating the Easter without him. Pimenta was thinking of his mother in far away Goa. Gloria thought of her *fiancé* and looked into her tiny little wrist watch and smiled to herself.

And then it happened—THUD—there was a muffled explosion that everyone heard and wondered what it was. The noise of the explosion woke me up.

## Only Ten Minutes To Live

I AWOKE with a start, wondering what had happened. Everyone aboard the *Kashmir Princess* was startled by the muffled explosion from somewhere. Miss Berry, D'Souza and Pimenta who were busy tidying up the galley, looked into each other's faces wondering what the explosion was. D'Cunha looked carefully all over the warning systems and engine dials to ensure there was nothing the matter with the faithful motors. Jatar and Dikshit looked at each other for a while, and Pathak stood behind the pilots, awaiting instructions. Jatar immediately turned round to Pathak and told him to look for the source of the loud report. In a flash they had remembered the rumours of sabotage which they had heard whilst at Hong Kong, and which at that time no one had taken very seriously.

The loud report of the explosion silenced the chatter amongst the passengers and grim anxiety shadowed gaiety of a few moments ago. Still half dazed with sleep, I stood in the aisle-way motionless, wondering what was that ominous thud and from where it came. I kept wondering whether some heavy object had fallen on the cabin floor somewhere, or whether I had just dreamt of the sound in my sleep.

Instantly I became aware of someone behind me. I turned round and saw a Chinese delegate standing there and merely staring at me. This was the first indication I had that everything was not all right. I half opened

my mouth to ascertain from the Chinese gentleman about the explosion ; but since he was speechless I inferred that he probably did not speak English, and any enquiry from him would only add to the delay. If an explosion had taken place, action—immediate action—was necessary. I had better ask the other crew members. Goodness, there was no need to ask anyone now. The ‘cold air outlets’ by now had begun emitting white smoke into the cabin. The explosion was real. Now it flashed across my mind what the officer at Hong Kong had tried to caution me about. Somebody had obviously kept a deadly time-bomb somewhere and it had burst. My first reaction was that the bomb must have exploded in the rear baggage compartment. I wondered if I should make a visual check through the viewing lens. No, no, no,—Any delay would be fatal. All the passengers were sitting right there above the baggage compartment, the roof of which formed the base of the cabin. If flames managed to pierce through this into the cabin, besides the possibility of fire spreading to out-of-control proportions, the passengers might get into panic. And in an emergency nothing should be so perilous as panic.

I thought all about it only for a few seconds. I ran, with a lightning flash, to the cockpit and reported : “Captain Jatar, probably there is a fire in the rear baggage compartment.” Without hesitation Jatar gave orders in his usual cool, confident manner to D’Cunha, “Carry out emergency depressurisation and extinguish the fire in the rear baggage compartment.”

I knelt down on the cockpit floor to assist D’Cunha and moved the levers, which are rather hard to operate, and then D’Cunha pulled the control to discharge carbon dioxide in the rear baggage compartment to extinguish the fire. He then informed Captain Jatar of completion of the operation.

### ONLY TEN MINUTES TO LIVE

Pathak rushed into the cockpit and reported, "Fire on the right hand wing." Pathak had barely uttered those words, when without awaiting further orders from Jatar I ran back into the cabin to check the location and extent of the fire. I abandoned all thoughts of checking the fire in the rear baggage compartment. If at all there was fire in this compartment it should be extinguished by now. The fire was immediately behind the innermost petrol tank, and spreading rapidly. I rushed back to Captain Jatar, and gave him an accurate location of the fire on the right wing. Whilst informing the Captain of the location and extent of fire, I suggested at the same time : "Capt. Jatar, the only alternative is to "ditch" (land on water) the aircraft as soon as practicable." Meanwhile D'Cunha reported to Capt. Jatar, that the hydraulic system had failed.

Capt. Dikshit, learning from me the extent and location of the fire grimly exclaimed, "They have done us in," sensing that it was undoubtedly an act of sabotage. He asked Capt. Jatar "Shall I send the MAYDAY signal?" (MAYDAY is the code word meaning S.O.S. to be used by aircraft in extreme distress).

"No. Wait for a moment. You take over the controls. I will make sure how bad the fire is. In the mean time put her (the airplane) in a steep descent."

Dikshit switched off the automatic pilot control and manually put the aircraft in a steep descent.

Jatar got out of his seat and hurriedly went into the cabin to assess the extent of the fire.

Within a few seconds Jatar returned to his seat. "Dickie, send the MAYDAY signal," said he. One glance at the fire

had convinced him that a time-bomb must have punctured one of the fuel tanks, so rapidly was the fire spreading. Chances of survival were too small. The aircraft was in extreme danger. He must put it down on the water as fast as possible. He took over the controls with amazing coolness. He showed nerves of steel.

Dikshit picked up the microphone and said in calm voice, "Victor Echo Papa Calling. MAYDAY MAYDAY MAYDAY." He wanted to enquire from Capt. Jatar if he should send message whether they suspected it to be a sabotage and that the right wing was on fire.

Just then Jatar said in a note of urgency, "Dickie, help me with controls. Hold the aileron control hard over to the left and press the left rudder pedal a little harder."

Dikshit's entire energies were required to concentrate on assisting Jatar keep the *Kashmir Princess* in a level attitude. Dikshit was compelled to abandon all thoughts of sending further messages.

I started back for my observation post. Since one baggage compartment was suspected to be on fire, I made sure by a personal check on the other baggage compartment that there was no trace of fire there.

The wild fire was in such a location of the aircraft that there was no way whatever to extinguish it. The flames would spread wildly on and on over the entire airplane, devour the passengers and the crew in an agonizing death.

There was no way in which the fire could be combated and no signs of its abating either, no landing field anywhere in close proximity (Nearest was Singapore 350 miles away). These factors naturally left the only avenue open to survival

#### ONLY TEN MINUTES TO LIVE

—landing the aircraft on the water as soon as it was practicable. Capt. Jatar took the decision to ditch the aircraft.

Ditching and life-jackets go together. Whilst returning to my observation post, I thought that D'Souza, Pimenta and Berry may be awaiting the Captain's orders to brace all the passengers with life-jackets and that I should communicate to them the Captain's decision to ditch the aircraft. When I threw open the cabin door, the sight nearly dazzled me. Until now there was not a moment to spare to look at the passengers. All of them were quietly sitting in their places, and each one was already equipped with a life-jacket. It was remarkable on the part of Berry, D'Souza and Pimenta to have distributed jackets to all the passengers not awaiting the formalities of the Captain's orders. Every one instinctively knew that the Captain expected of each one to carry out one's duty, and they all lived up to his expectations.

I returned to my observation post—a window directly overlooking the right-hand wing. The ghastly fire continued to devour the wing. Flames—yellow and orange, of ever increasing magnitude—continued their death-stinging dance to an unruly rhythm. The tough aluminium metal of the wing was burning like paper, becoming weaker, losing its bond with the rest of the wing and bits of it dropped down and vanished into the atmosphere. There was nothing I could do, but watch the devouring fire.

I kept peering through the window aghast. The fire now was right upto the inner-most fuel tank. The tank would soon be heated up—the deadly petrol inside it would reach a temperature to explode it. I felt almost certain that the explosion would take place any second now and would kill everyone instantaneously. Even if it

did not, it would at least blow up the wing with the result that the aircraft would spin violently and crash to splinters on the water. Death in any event seemed certain. There was no escape. No one else in the aircraft had an inkling of such a positive end. I felt that it would be very unwise to share such a view under the circumstances. However certain of an inevitable end one must never give up hope—and hope can survive only if one fights against all the odds, no matter how invincible they seem. The flames were being fanned by the wind due to the onrushing airplane, and it had to be kept in speed to keep it aloft.

I kept watching the ever-spreading fire. So, these were going to be the last moments of my life—in a burning, crashing airplane. I will never, never have the opportunity to see my family again—rather they will not see me again. I would see each one of the family members and my *fiancée* pass on the red screen of the fire in front of me.

A full minute or two had passed since the flames had crawled upto the tank. It should have exploded by now. I kept wondering what could it be that had prevented the tank from exploding. It was possible that the tank was punctured thus preventing a build up of pressure inside it. Yes, the tank must have got punctured by the explosion or the fire would not have spread with such wild rapidity.

By now the flames had almost come up to where the wing is joined to the cabin. Flames soaring high above the window, obscured the wing. I could feel the heat inside. The flames will now start burning away the cabin. I only hoped that the cabin should be fully depressurised before it starts melting away, (for any opening in a pressurised cabin will lead to sudden pressure loss, with consequent

damage to the ear-drums of passengers and crew members). The flaming fire reflected inside the cabin its fiery red glow, as if the whole cabin was a smouldering oven. The white seat covers assumed a red tone and every part around in the cabin was bathed in the flaming red colour of the blood-thirsty flames, that were only inches away, ever approaching closer and closer.

Jatar and Dikshit at the controls kept fighting with the swirling airplane. It was a hard task to keep the airplane under control under such adverse conditions. The hydraulic system failure soon after the explosion made controls harder to manipulate ; the right-hand wing area was being reduced every second and this unbalanced the lift from the wings and the airplane could no more be made to follow a straight and level course.

Pathak stood behind the pilots, peering hard in front, looking out for the Natuna group of islands, the site chosen for ditching. D'Cunha kept vigilantly at the formidable task of controlling the engine power and emergency depressurizing the cabin in an ever descending airplane. The passengers, with an iron will, remained in their seats in spite of the flaming death-dance around. Miss Berry, D'Souza and Pimenta resolutely remained with the passengers to keep up their spirits.

It suddenly flashed into my mind that the crew members in the cockpit may not be equipped with life-jackets. I picked three life-jackets (I could not carry more than three in one trip) and dashed to the front. I left these in the Navigator's compartment and was returning to the cabin to pick up two more. As I opened the cabin entrance door, I perceived Miss Berry with three life-jackets heading for the cockpit. Her face was white, expressionless ; she did not look at me, but merely stared

in front seized up by a sense of duty which makes actions look more mechanical than inspired. I dared not look into her face too long, so grim she looked. I merely held the cabin door open for her to enter the cockpit and followed her. I gave one jacket to Pathak and one to D'Cunha. D'Cunha slipped the jacket around his neck. Since both his hands were engaged, I stepped up to him and tied the straps of his jacket around his waist. Then I braced myself with a jacket in a hurry.

Gloria took life-jackets to the two pilots. Both pilots faced such terrific odds—with one of the wings half burnt, aircraft flying partially out of control in a swirling motion and the dense smoke inside the entire cabin and cockpit—that they could not give even a fraction of a moment's attention to such things as life-jackets. Their attention was centred on one objective—putting the airplane on water as quickly as possible. Gloria realized it, and was determined to put life-jackets on both the pilots. When she realized that none of them could possibly wear the life-jackets themselves she stepped forward and put one on Jatar and the other on Dikshit and said "Please wear it." She hurriedly tied the straps of their jackets. Only after everyone had been equipped with life-jackets did she wear one herself. Then she went through the dense black smoke into the cabin with unfaltering step as one impelled by an over-powering sense of duty.

Capt. Jatar thought just before ditching he should try to send out their exact position. The last normal message was sent when they were exactly over the Natuna Group of Islands. About 15 minutes had elapsed since then. If rescue organizations had commenced since their sending the MAYDAY signal, the rescue parties may be directed well away from the site of ditching. After the fire had commenced and it was decided to ditch the airplane,

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Capt. Jatar had turned the *Kashmir Princess* back to the islands to land as near the coast as practicable of the Great Natuna. With these thoughts in mind he said to Dikshit, "Dickie, transmit our present position and tell them our airplane is sabotaged."

Dikshit immediately picked up the microphone from the hook to his right and pressed its button. Something more was gone wrong. There was'nt the usual humming noise. He released the switch and pressed it again. Was the radio dead ! He tried to speak into the microphone, "This is Victor Echo Papa. MAYDAY." He was now convinced that the radio was out of commission. Even sending of the distress message was now impossible. He knew the electrical system must have failed due to the fire. He reported to Jatar, "Captain, the radio is dead. The electrical system has failed I guess."

Failure of any of the systems was to be expected from such a fire. Capt. Jatar ordered D'Cunha to switch off the electrical generators and the batteries and merely said, "Let us hope for the best."

I stepped forward to Captain Jatar and informed him of my opinion about the extent of the fire by then : "Captain Jatar, the wing may drop off within a couple of minutes," to which Capt. Jatar merely said in a cool unperturbed voice, "We are ditching."

It was useless returning to the cabin to watch the fire, for nothing but flames were visible through the windows. And now a more important job awaited me, that of opening the emergency escape windows and doors. I had already decided the order in which to open the windows. There is a definite procedure for opening the emergency windows, which when carried out in order, expels the

smoke from the cabin if any. I was now only awaiting orders to open the emergency exits, and the order would be given as soon as the cabin was fully depressurised.

As I stood there waiting for my orders, D'Cunha agitatedly informed Capt. Jatar that No. 3 engine was on fire. This was from the fire warning indicating system. We all knew that it was not the engine on fire but that the fire had 'spread' upto the engine. The Captain ordered the engine to be stopped and fire extinguishing procedure to be followed. I had half a mind of advising the Captain not to stop the engine; because stopping of this engine was going to worsen the swirling motion of the airplane. But on second thought I felt it was better to face worse handling of the airplane than worse fire. Fire had already reached up to the engine and unless the engine was stopped, its pumps would literally add fuel to fire. Immediately on the Captain's orders the engine was stopped, and the remaining set of carbon-dioxide bottles discharged on the engine. Yet the fire did not abate in the least. The next warning in the cockpit sounded from the right hand cabin heater. (There are two heater units, for the purpose of sending in heated air in the cabin, situated in the belly of the airplane in line with the wing rear edge). The fire now had crawled upto this heater unit—i.e., upto the main body of the airplane. But no more carbon-dioxide was left over. There was nothing to be done; and even if we had some carbon-dioxide available it would have been ineffective against this giant fire. The size of the fire was too big to be combated by the normal provision available on an airplane. The designer had not anticipated such a fire, and certainly not in the location where it was encountered. Hence he (designer of the airplane) had made available fire extinguishing provisions only in locations where there was likelihood of an internal fire, and that too, of a limited quantity enough to smother

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the fire of a magnitude anticipated. The fire was abnormally large, and in an unexpected place. It ruthlessly went on spreading over the wing, just as a river does once it has broken through a dam.

Hardly a minute had elapsed since I had last stepped in the cockpit awaiting orders for opening the emergency escape windows. D'Cunha informed the Captain that the cabin now was fully depressurised. I stood in readiness to dart to the cabin and out came orders from Capt. Jatar, "Karnik, open the emergency exits."

It is necessary to open these exits before the impact of the aircraft with water. On impact, the body of the aircraft, even in the case of the most cautious and skilled landing, gets distorted and perfectly fitting exits get buckled and in many instances cannot be opened. When a normal landing is made on hard ground the wheels and specially-designed shock absorbers take all the landing impact. But in the case of a landing on water, wheels and shock absorbers are of no avail and the main body of the airplane directly receives all the shock, with the resultant buckling.

Captain Jatar had barely given his orders to me when I rushed into the cabin. The cabin was like a smouldering furnace, red as blood and intensely hot. The window on the right side showed nothing but flames, big red flames and more red flames. It was amazing that the wing still remained attached to the main body. It still gave lift, though at a diminishing rate. The left wing was clean, intact and in one piece. In those few minutes each one in the aircraft had sensed death—red-hot and fiery. Everyone had battled against it; hoping against hope to come out alive. All were alive this minute. A few minutes later it would be a different story. Perhaps none would live. Yet I hoped that the aircraft might float for a few

minutes. Even three minutes would be enough to save all on board. I felt that it was better that the right wing was on fire and not the left one. There are two dinghys (life-boats) stored in the left one, while only one in the right one. The dinghys are stored behind the engine nearest to the cabin. The right hand dinghy had already burnt away.

I put my hand to the unlocking lever of the emergency escape window over the left wing. After unlocking it I tried to pull it in. It refused to yield to normal force and stayed in place. This meant that there was still slightly higher pressure inside the cabin than outside which held the window firmly in its place. But there was no time to be lost. With all my strength I gave a forceful jerk and managed to pull the window in. A lot of air from inside the cabin gushed out. The next window I chose to open was from the Navigator's compartment, so the crew could get out ; and after opening this I had intended to rush to the rear end of the passenger cabin to open the main entrance door.

Only a few seconds after I opened the cabin emergency exit, billows of dense black smoke entered the cabin from outside. For a few seconds I was flabbergasted. This had happened because the fire had spread upto the left wing and the aircraft was flying in a swirling motion. The only way to combat this unexpected peril was to work fast on the next projects. I came into the Navigator's compartment and opened the emergency exit therein. I had barely left the exit frame on the floor when I felt myself suffocated for want of fresh air. The dense black smoke had entered the cabin and followed me faster than I had anticipated. I glanced towards the cabin. It was full of smoke—black, dense, suffocating. Hopes of ditching vanished from my mind. In a few

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seconds all the occupants of the aircraft would be choked unconscious and the aircraft would drop on the water, uncontrolled. There was nothing to be done; nothing could be done. For want of life-giving oxygen, I felt myself crippled, my hands getting numb, darkness covering my eyes and my legs giving in. I just could not fight for life, for my legs refused to support me, hands could not grip anything. One little breath full of fresh air would have brought back all my energies and I could have rushed back to the cabin to open its door.

The smoke had reached right upto the cockpit, obscuring everything from sight. In the whole of the airplane nothing was visible even at a distance of six inches. Jatar and Dikshit were trying hard to peer through the smoke. The islands had hills on them. There was a danger of crashing into the hills. And worst was the danger of reducing the aircraft speed too much. Dikshit bent forward almost touching his nose on the air-speed-indicator and made sure that the aircraft was flying at a safe speed. D'Cunha was unable to keep a check on the engine power because all the engine instruments were obscured by the smoke. Now the only chance of survival was to admit some fresh air from somewhere. It struck D'Cunha suddenly that one of the windows in front of the cockpit if opened now, could save us. He said to Dikshit, "Dickie, open the window on your side." He said this once or twice more. Jatar heard this and asked Dikshit to open the window. Dikshit immediately acted on the command. Fresh air gushed in renewing the fighting energies of the crew members in the cockpit and the Navigator's compartment. A delay of a few more seconds in opening the window would have turned us all into corpses.

The open window in front of co-pilot Dikshit not only brought fresh air, but both the pilots were able to see outside and were able to guide the airplane better.

"Dickie, you watch the air-speed," said Capt. Jatar.

Now I may be able to put the airplane gently on water thought Jatar. He knew that this was nearly an impossible task. But with iron will, staunch determination and cool composure he was confident of doing his best under the worst odds a pilot might face.

I was about to drop down through suffocation. Opening the cock-pit window brought to my choked lungs exuberant, cool and fresh air. I filled my lungs with this fresh air, and life sprang into me anew. I clutched the Navigator's desk with my right hand, I knew that my legs once again could support the weight of my body. Darkness faded away and I became conscious of the reality—grim, black and obscure. The black smoke had continued its advance. It lay dense all around. My legs alert waited for orders from the brain for their next assignment. Yes, the main cabin door was yet to be opened. I opened my eyes and casually glanced through the big opening of the emergency exit in front of me. Alas, water was only a few feet below. I felt sorry that I would not be able to open the cabin door. Because should the aircraft sink immediately on touching water, it would be very difficult for the passengers to crawl under water upto the nearest emergency exit—which was over the left hand wing. I only wished that D'Souza or Pimenta had already opened the door.

When I saw water only a few feet below the airplane, I had to abandon all thoughts of reaching for the cabin door. I knew that the airplane would hit water any second. When landing on water is made, every person in the aircraft is required to strap himself to a chair. If unstrapped he is likely to get badly injured by being thrown forward due to momentum. I knew that there was no time left for me to seek a chair and strap myself on to it. I

had to take whatever might come in the place where I was standing. I knew that this was a very dangerous location to wait in. The engines were immediately behind it and in an impact of nature awaiting us, the motion of the airplane is arrested by water but the engines, with their propellers turning, continue moving forward. Should the airplane slightly tilt on touching, the nearest engine and propeller might cut through this compartment smashing it to bits.

I was caught in the compartment. Any attempt to move would have been fatal. It would be a matter of seconds between life and death. A thought lurked in my mind that in all probability it would be a sudden death, too sudden to feel the pain. Instinctively I folded my hands on the Navigator's table and placed my face on them—downwards, standing in a bent attitude. The very next instant I heard the water splash as the airplane hit it. I felt the floor I was standing on giving in, I suddenly rolled over and was under water. I felt that I was being showered by a hundred odd metallic objects. I was so certain that a propeller would cut me to bits or the cabin would telescope into the front end of the aircraft, that I kept my eye-lids closed and dared not open them. All that splashing of the water, crashing of metals and my tumbling and rolling over quietened suddenly. All movements had apparently come to a stop. No cutting by propellers, no smashing by fuselage. No splinters piercing through me like a dozen swords at a time. I was alive. But how long would I remain alive? And what had happened to all the others?

## Out of the Jaws of Death

I OPENED my eyes and saw light-green water all around me. I was no more inside the aircraft. No parts of the aircraft were within my sight. The light-green colour of the water indicated that it was not too deep. A few strokes of the hands brought me to the surface. A lot of splinters and pieces—one as big as ten feet in length—and a number of rubber cushions from the seats were floating in front of me. Behind me I felt scorching heat. I turned around and breathlessly beheld the most appalling sight I ever saw. Nothing like this had I ever seen—not even on the silver screen. The ditchings and the crashes I had seen on the screen seem so unrealistic and tame in comparison. The real damage that was caused was far worse than what is generally imagined. Petrol tanks, on impact, must have crashed open, spreading their explosive contents over the water. This was ignited by the already burning right wing. Over a circle, two hundred feet in diameter, its nearest edge only twenty feet away from me, red hot, lava-like flames, shot out from the water dancing and glaring viciously. The lethal flames shot up towards the sky over fifty feet high, and a jet-black mushroom of dense smoke, rose from above the flames. All I knew then was that I was alive. There was no one else on the surface. I could not imagine what had happened to them, whether they were still inside the aircraft or whether they were trapped in the harrowing mass of flaming fire. Though alive, I did not feel completely out of peril, yet. The blinding mass of fire was close to me, fiercely laughing,

## OUT OF THE JAWS OF DEATH

ever-ready to swallow me. It swallowed more than half the giant airplane. Man's life seemed too insignificant to it. It devoured whatever came in its way—man or metal—and laughed hideously at the helplessness of man, who thinks himself to be the master of the universe. This must have been the story of many an air crash. Victims survive one peril only to face another.

I gave a quick glance around and perceived, with a sigh of relief, tiny islands all around me, the nearest about four miles away. On my right was a small island—which had a very high hill on it, beckoning me. This hill made the island most prominent. And perhaps for this very reason I intended to make a dash for it, neglecting other islands at closer distances. I could not reason about this significantly unrewarding choice. I knew very well that my endurance would not last right up to this distant island. Yet it had a strange fascination which benumbed my normal reasoning. Recalling the incident, I feel fortunate in not attempting to swim to it. I know, now, that it would have been easier to attempt to reach the distant island than swim to the other closer ones, because the current of water was in that direction. But it would have meant definite burning death. The burning petrol and oil were moving along the current towards that very island. Had I chosen to swim in the same direction, the burning oil would surely have overtaken me.

I lay in the water practically motionless, thinking about the island for which I was about to make a start. I saw in front of me floating a big piece of the fuselage—about ten feet long—Since its under surface was circular I guessed that it might float for a considerable time. An urge overtook me to stay on this floating piece until I felt stronger to make for some island. Immediately I abandoned all thoughts of making for the island with the big hill and

swam briskly upto this floating mass. I had to swim with shirt and trouser on. These got drenched with water and became very heavy. I felt a bit exhausted—perhaps from shock. I clutched this piece of the fuselage. All its edges were sharp and twisted from tear—and I had to choose a clean section of the edge, to avoid damage to my hands. I tried to lift myself on the floating piece. But alas, I just could not. There was nothing solid on which I could step and climb. My water-soaked clothes kept pulling me down in the water. But get up on the piece I must. I was not prepared to give up the floating mass. It might keep me floating until help arrived—no, it would be suicidal to keep waiting on it, especially when land was in sight and the sun still shining brightly. I decided to wait on it only until I felt fit to swim across. I jerked myself out of the water and placed my right knee on the piece and then lifted my left leg out from the water. Then I raised myself and stood on the piece which was all tattered with piercing sharp corners all over. I had removed my shoes in the aircraft before sleeping and my socks had slipped out, probably when I went into the water along with the aircraft. I was careful not to injure my feet.

I stood there, only twenty feet, from the massive fire. Even fearful sights have their attractions. I have often wondered what was it that made me wait so close to the ghastly fire. It might have spread and burnt me. The safest way naturally lay in swimming away from the fire as hurriedly as I could. But I was thrilled to perceive this fiery giant and I merely kept watching it, motionless. The sky above was pitch black, filled with clouds and clouds of smoke. Below this dark agony were the wild naked flames, fierce and hot like thousands of hungry dragon-tongues in a single concourse. These dancing hungry flames had lit up the entire sea around

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with the same bloody red colour. Every wave-crest reflected the merciless moods of the burning oil, petrol and the airplane. The deep blue tropical sea, in a matter of minutes, was transformed into a sea of flames. All the energy of the petrol that was trapped in the wings and burned under control in the engines was suddenly unleashed, like a genie out of a magician's bottle exhibiting its true might, frightening the man who normally controlled it, reducing him to insignificance.

Only seconds after I got on the floating piece of cabin, fire started spreading on the surface of the water (due to petrol spreading on it). Some sort of helplessness had seized me. My legs refused to jump off into the water to get away from the advancing fiery death. I thought any struggle in the face of spreading burning petrol would be futile. I stood there making no effort to get away, ready to give in to the agonizing fire. This must be the inevitable end of most of the air disasters. Those who survive the first impact are pursued by others equally perilous. It is like the remnants of the vanquished army being destroyed by the victors. The flames came nearer and nearer. Their fierce, brutal, merciless lust for human blood reminded me of the cannibals approaching their prey. Helplessly I kept watching the blood-thirsty dance. I felt the intense heat too close to me. The burning flames were blindingly bright, so I closed my eyes. I knew that in a matter of seconds all the agonies would end once and for all. No more struggling through the water. No crawling on coral rocks. No lying on an uninhabited island and no death through starvation and thirst. It would be better to perish now than to die later a suffering, agonizing death. The next instant the flames, should be clinging on to me. I lay there thinking of the fiery death, to my utter surprise I felt the heat receding. I opened my eyes. The fire by no means had abated

as yet, but it was no more crawling towards me. I felt relieved. The approaching fire must have begun due *to the spread of a thin film of petrol, now burnt away.* Now that I was free from the fear of burning death, I started thinking anew to choose an island which would be closest. Though it was tempting to stay on this piece of floating metal mass, it could not be trusted for too long. Eventually it may sink. I glanced around. A number of small islands lay around me.

Hardly half a minute had elapsed since I had taken refuge on this floating island, when I saw Pathak emerge from the water. He was dangerously close to the fire swimming around the same spot, dazed a little and he kept on shouting. On coming out of the water and perceiving such a mass of fire so close, he must have suddenly, and in dread, realized the perilous situation. The heat must have been too intense to bear. He was shouting from the torturous unbearable heat. The intensity of the heat of the fire was great enough to numb the sense of hearing. And I knew that, that was what had happened to Pathak. He was not aware of how close he was to the deadly fire, and stayed practically at the same spot. I kept shouting, "Pathak, get away from the fire. Pathak get away from the fire."

My shouts brought his shocked nerves back to the realization of the horrible reality—that the airplane had crashed and sunk in the sea. He did not know what had happened to the rest of the crew and the passengers. All he knew that I was shouting at him to get away from the burning mass of the fire which was so dangerously close to him.

Pathak, on hearing my shouts, swam away from the fire, and was now only a few feet from me.

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Beyond him I saw Dikshit who had just come up to the surface. He had stayed a considerable time under water. Now I started calling out to Dikshit. "Come away from the fire; come on, Captain, come with me; I cannot go alone; come on Captain." I could not understand why I kept calling him "Captain." He was a close friend of mine and I had always called him Dikshit or even Dickie. I suppose that in the face of death there is no normal reasoning. He snubbed me even in the water. "Forget Captain," he said. Yes, we must all for the time being forget rank and prestige. The airplane was burnt, shattered and sunk. He had no airplane at the moment to captain. We were reduced to a common level by a common danger.

Dikshit heard my cries and drifted towards us. Pathak by now had passed me. I wished I could jump into the water and join Dikshit. Just then the floating piece which supported me so long began sinking rapidly. It was like a rock one leans against for support but turns into a treacherous crocodile. I was sinking but that was not all, I was dragged down under water, as my trouser was caught in one of the torn ends of the fuselage piece.

Alas, having got away so far, was I destined for a death through drowning. How treacherous to have come out alive from a burning airplane, shattered to bits, and be dragged now down under the deep blue water, never to breathe the life-giving air again. Down below will I be dragged in and salty-water will replace oxygen-filled air in the lungs. The lungs will struggle harder and harder, but in vain—the struggle will soon come to an inevitable end. What an agonizing death! Why was I destined to be killed in this tortuous way? Why didn't I die when the aircraft had splintered to bits? I resolved finally to meet my destiny—of which I was so certain. It would have meant an instantaneous death, perhaps pain-

less. But I was no chooser ; I must take what comes my way. No, I thought; so long as there was life in my limbs to struggle—struggle I must and never be a prey to these treacherous snares of death. Life may hang by a thin chord which may snap easily. Yet this thin life-chord can be strengthened by defying death. It was the right leg of the trouser that was caught. I concentrated all my strength in my right leg and gave a hard kick to the metal piece. I didn't even think I might badly injure my foot. Life was worth the bargain, though with an injured foot. The kick worked. I was barely dragged in knee-deep when I freed myself from the metal piece, which decided to seek its abode on the sandy bottom of the South China Sea.

What a joy it was to be freed from the clutches of agonizing death, to awaken to the knowledge that there was a chance to live again. Death by no means was gone for good. Its lurking, soft foot-steps seemed close by. But life had surged into me again. The struggle to live must go on. When you come so close to death, you realize the fulness of the joy of living—even the very thought that you are alive, may even be for a short time.

I swam up to Dikshit. I saw his inflated yellow life-jacket. I became aware for the first time that I was swimming all this time. Involuntarily I shouted, "Where's my jacket ? " Yes, the jacket was around me. It was far too close to be noticed, I pulled the automatically-inflating lever. The jacket jerked itself and lifted me an inch more than my swimming position. I sighed with relief at being able to float effortlessly. Once again I gazed around to pick on the nearest island; just then Dikshit said to me, "Karnik, I have a broken collar bone. Please don't leave me alone."

I replied unhesitatingly, "Don't worry, Dickie, I will stay with you. We will swim or sink together."

## “We Swim or Sink Together”

WE WERE once again no choosers. From nowhere a warm water current emerged (which I explained later as hot convection current due to petrol burning on the water) and all three of us were caught in it. We were being dragged away from the mass of the fire—Pathak, myself and Dikshit, that was the order, separated by only about twelve to fifteen feet from each other. This water-stream had such force that one could not but give in to be dragged away. Away and further away were we being taken to a safer distance out of the clutches of fiery death. And lo, someone else was up on the surface, too. We all could hear his shrieks clearly. Shrieks through pain. Besides shrieks, in clear English he shouted, “Where are you? Where are you?” Though well within hearing distance, we couldn’t rush to assist him in any way as all of us were being drifted away. He was about twenty yards away from Dikshit. All three of us were within hearing distance of one another and said almost simultaneously. “It must be D’Cunha, probably badly injured. “We all three raised our hands and shouted to the injured person, “Follow us.” This was hardly necessary. He too was in the same stream following us without, perhaps, any efforts. During the period of this mutual exchange we saw one more person afloat. By now we had moved a good deal of distance and were not in a position to say if this person was in a conscious or unconscious state, dead or alive. All we then saw was a yellow inflated life-jacket. One has to be alive and conscious to inflate a jacket and so we surmised this person also was alive.

## KASHMIR PRINCESS

All five of us, first three almost together and the other two separated by twenty to thirty yards, were being moved rapidly away from the burning mass of petrol, oil and metal. We felt happy that we were getting away from the fire. No more was there any danger of the spreading fire overtaking us. It was the same fiery giant which had helped us get away from its own clutches.

After we had moved about a hundred yards away the force of the water-stream died and everyone became standstill. I hoped some more persons from the aircraft to come to the surface—and to life. But, alas, just five persons were all that were shown any mercy. The fire by now had reduced considerably, and was being drifted towards the west. This was fortunate too. We had moved in the direction of the south.

Now for the first time we were at a safe distance from the ever threatening fire. This allowed me to make a better, clearer and more accurate survey to look for safety. Till now death being at such close quarters, I tried to clutch for safety whatever seemed close at hand and whatever was most prominent. Besides the five lives afloat there were no more. As to the identity of the last two we did not know. Even these two persons had bubbled upto the surface a long time after they had submerged. I admired their tenacity to hold their breath for such a long period. These two persons were ejected to the surface in quick succession. I watched in eagerness for more to follow. It was unfortunate that perhaps they were already doomed to death. Everything had rather quietened now. The stream had stopped, the fire was dying down and the fourteen under water, alas, must have stopped breathing. Never will they struggle again for another breath, nor will they resist when the fierce teeth of hungry sharks bite into their limbs.

## “WE SWIM OR SINK TOGETHER”

We were surrounded by islands on all sides, one large and three small ones with wide gaps in between. From the scene of the crash the hot water stream had drifted us in the direction of island ‘A’. I chose this island for landing. Firstly because the stream had pushed us in that direction and I expected lesser resistance if we continued in the same direction. Secondly, island ‘A’ seemed more desirable than either island Salor or Great Natuna because of its flat surface and crowded coconut trees, contrary to island Salor’s barren hilly topography and Great Natuna’s vague shrubby uncertainty. I shouted to Dikshit without giving any reasons, “Let’s make for this island,” and I pointed to island ‘A’ and shouted to Pathak similarly.

Now the second phase for survival had begun. Pathak, myself and Dikshit were almost together and the other two about 150 yards away from us. Pathak had both bones of his left fore-arm broken, Dikshit had his right collar-bone broken. I knew that none of my bones were broken; yet my right foot hurt me while splashing through the water and I just could not move my left arm. We were unable to estimate other injuries just then. About the other two—we did not know their state at all.

The best course we thought was to hurry to the first accessible island and whosoever reached first should, with the help of local inhabitants, rescue the others. Getting all together would have been wasting precious daylight, we thought. I personally felt the possibility of inhabitants being there on the islands as very remote, so deserted was their look. I felt so all the more because the crash of such a big, burning airplane was within sight of any of the islands and the fire and smoke after the crash must have been visible for miles. A catastrophe of such magnitude would have definitely drawn out the simple inhabitants out of their hutments. Dikshit on the other

hand was very optimistic. Despite their seemingly deserted look he hoped to find help on every island.

The islands seemed to be within easy reach. We must spare no pains to get there before sundown. Pathak and Dikshit were doing admirably well in spite of their broken bones. I manoeuvred myself close to Dikshit to remain within helping distance. All three of us were struggling hard. We made fairly good progress in half an hour, the last two persons were afloat far behind.

The bright disc of the sun was assuming a pale red colour and approaching the western horizon faster. It added a red tinge to the water in the west and coloured up the vast cloudless sky. Far behind us lay the remnants of the *Kashmir Princess* fire in the form of a thin black shapeless cloud, drifting slowly towards the west. The green stubby little islands looked brighter in the slanting sun-rays—our only saviours in sight.

One full hour of struggle had yielded hardly any results. The small island 'A', that we were heading for, was as distant now as it was in the beginning. Besides Dikshit foresaw a danger in attempting to reach the small island. He realised that, should water currents drift us away from the island we could easily slip through the gaps between island 'A' and the Great Natuna, or 'A' and Salor islands and sharks might feast on us. He decided to change course, and Pathak and myself immediately followed suit. The Great Natuna had about two miles of shore towards us and a drift due to currents can never be that big to push us off its ends.

The crimson disc of the life-giving sun was on the edge of the horizon, about to dive beyond the sea. This was our only friend around. It couldn't wait for anyone.

“WE SWIM OR SINK TOGETHER”

Its routine must continue irrespective of the fate of others. We might never see it again. The sunset of 11th of April, 1955 might be the sunset of our lives.

Pathak now was a good hundred yards ahead of us. Dikshit and I remained together ever trying to make for the Great Natuna. We kept in touch with Pathak through whistles (which are attached to the life-jackets). Dikshit's life-jacket had an illuminated water-proof bulb lighted ever since he had inflated the jacket, but till now it was hardly visible. Now that sunlight was fading, the miniature bulb became visible. Its presence was felt and it was a welcome one. This tiny light could be our saviour, a straw to the sinking man, in the grim darkness that would soon fall on this part of the globe. The last two afloat were so far behind as to be hidden from sight by the innumerable little waves.

I pulled up the sleeve of my shirt on the left arm to see what time it was; to my surprise the watch had slipped off. It did not worry me in the least. I knew that I must struggle until I hit land or die of exhaustion. A time check would have made known the hours of struggle and might have discouraged me.

All our thoughts were concentrated in an effort to find the quickest way to one of the islands around us. We had originally estimated that it would take us less than an hour to reach an island. Now it was well over an hour since we had commenced our struggle in the water and we became aware that it might perhaps take us much longer before we would step on solid earth.

We had now the first moment of intervening thoughts. Dikshit and myself though had been swimming and floating over an hour, did not know how the other had got out

from the airplane. From a burning airplane which had crashed in water the chances of getting away alive were one in a million.

Dikshit asked me, "Did you come out from an emergency window?"

"No," I said, "I guess the craft broke up and I was thrown into the water."

"How did you manage to come out from the cockpit?" I enquired. "The window in front of me" said he.

"Really?" I said. "This is amazing. For certain of our ground checks we do go through it and that too only upto the waist. And Lord, I know how difficult it is. I don't think I could have ever come out of that window under water."

Then he went on giving the full details.

He saw the tip of the right wing enter water. He knew that the next moment the rest of the aircraft would hit the water. He saw water approaching very fast. It came closer and closer. He felt the splash of water on his face. He had to close his eyes because of the great pressure of water on his face. Now he felt that water was all around him and force of the water kept him pinned to his seat. This was fortunate, otherwise the jolt of the plane hitting the water might cause either his face to hit on the control column or his head into the wind-shield in the front.

Slowly the onrush of the water subsided and the airplane came to a rest. He felt terrific pressure on his eardrums. He knew that the airplane had sunk and with it he lay down below under the ocean. He opened his eyes. Nothing was visible at this depth.

He knew that he must hurry and get out of the place before his breath ran out. He unstrapped himself and groped under water for the storm window opening. He knew that whatever slender chances of escape to safety were there, the window opening was more promising. The emergency exit in the Navigator's compartment or even the crew door would be too far away to cope up with the available oxygen in the lungs. He opened the sliding window to its full extent, supported his feet on some part of the cockpit and raised his body through the window opening and out. So he was safe, he thought.

After half of his body had smoothly slid out, he got a shock to find that his waist was stuck at the window. He tried to pick the support he was standing on. Even that failed to free him from the cockpit. The same cockpit, from where he had helped Jatar work the aircraft controls and ditched the aircraft as best as was possible under the circumstances, was clutching at him, trying to hold him back. His breath was almost used up. And free himself he must. But how?

His last chance he thought he must risk. That was to inflate the life-jacket. On every flight, during the life-jacket drill, he had heard "Do not inflate your life-jacket until you are clear off the aircraft." The life-jacket may get cut by the torn aircraft metal skin. This was his last chance and it was better to have the life-jacket cut and he be freed from the ocean trap than not get freed at all. He gave a jerk to the toggle of the life-jacket. He suddenly felt a stabbing pain near his right shoulder, and he was shooting upwards through water. He was safe at last to the surface of the water. Then he discovered that his right collar-bone had been fractured. How and when, he could'n't say.

Dikshit and I kept talking, floating side by side. We

both were so very optimistic that Pathak had either reached the island we were heading for, or he would very soon reach it. Dikshit kept saying, "I hope Panditji (Pathak's pet name among friends) contacts some fishermen and gets a boat to rescue us." I was still pessimistic about finding that island inhabited, but to keep up our spirits I could not express myself, and I deliberately said to Dikshit, "I hope so."

Since I could not make use of my left arm and Dikshit of his right arm for swimming, we often drifted a little apart. Dikshit thought that once sunlight completely faded away we might lose track of each other and all our efforts to stay together till now would be futile. Dikshit had the brilliant idea of tying ourselves together. Our life-jackets had about one foot each of extra strap. We tied together the straps. These are strong canvas straps, and would never break. After tying, enough slack was left to allow for flexibility in our different movements. Yet no matter how we swam, we always kept together. We were fortunate however, with regard to our damaged arms. My injured left arm and Dikshit's injured right arm were side by side. We moved simultaneously, our sound arms and legs progressing in a straight line.

We became aware of the cold hard fact that there must be strong water-currents which had prevented us from getting near the shore. A distance which at first sight I thought we would traverse in about two hours, did not seem even a knot nearer. Realizing this, Dikshit said, "We should have asked Pathak to stay with us, too." I disagreed with him, saying, "Pathak is a better swimmer, that would have meant spoiling his chances of reaching the islands earlier." Dikshit agreed with this view-point.

The last of the twilight was fading rapidly and the

shadow of the approaching grim darkness was descending on us. Small little clouds hung on the horizon ; they too were losing their crimson touch and assuming the same grimness of the lonely darkness, soon to rule in the tropics. The greenery of the islands appeared in mere black contours. The only lights visible now were one on Dikshit's life-jacket and the other of the remnants of the burning oil that had drifted into the open sea towards the western horizon. How friendly the sunrays are, I realized then. Destination seemed obscure and it became difficult to keep the required direction. Though reasoning assured us that there were no lurking dangers around, yet fear gripped hard out of the depths of the darkness. *Big man-eating* fish might start on their hunt now, and put an end to our struggle of hours in a few minutes.

The battle was not going to be as short as we had anticipated. We knew that the water-currents might considerably delay our reaching the land. Our pace of swimming must be so adjusted as to last our energies indefinitely, without exhaustion ; at least until morning when help might arrive. The reserve of energies must last without any replenishment—not even a drop of water. We slowed down our pace and started striking our hands and feet at a steady rate.

The burning oil on the horizon had died away. As darkness grew, Dikshit's life-jacket light appeared brighter and cast a disc of light in the water, 10 to 12 feet in diameter. All the rest of the life-jackets had torches instead of the continuously burning light. The contour of the island had become dimmer still. Swimming with clothes on was a nuisance. So we acted on the advice Pathak gave us, when he was within hearing distance, to cast away our trousers. The contents of the trousers—money, wallet, sun-glasses and keys were discarded along with the

trousers. Immediately on leaving the trousers I felt the water very cold and regretted the action; but only for a while. The trousers certainly kept me warm. But the body soon accustomed itself to the new temperature and the discomfort vanished. I thanked the tropical sea for its bearable temperature. Had it been the northern seas, we might have been frozen to death.

It was very important that we keep moving in a straight line in the chosen direction. The contour of Great Natuna's shallow banks was dimly visible through the pitch dark surroundings. The life-jacket since it was tied on the chest, made it compulsory for us to float on our backs and swim backwards. To gauge the distance covered we had to twist our bodies and turn our necks through nearly 180 degrees to look at the apparently approaching bank of the island—a painful process. The best way to keep moving in approximately the desired direction was to hold a prominent object in front as a guide. The hills on Salor island served as an excellent landmark for such a guide. Dikshit and I kept the hill in view and swam backwards. Every half an hour or so when Dikshit would ask "Karnik, how much more to go?" I would go through the painful task of twisting my neck 180 degrees and reply, "Only a hundred yards more." After repeating three or four times such an answer Dikshit understood the joke. I knew that the island was not an inch closer. But I must keep our struggling spirits high. For, that was the only hope of surmounting the devilish powerful water-currents.

Heading in a straight line was a difficult task. Dikshit's life-jacket light used to flash brightly in the eyes. This made staring at the faintly visible contour landmark (the hill on island Salor) an eye-straining exercise. With the unusable left arm I tried to shield my eyes from this

hurting light. But the awkward position of the arm imposed a time limit on such a process and I had to suffer the glare of the tiny little bulb.

The dim contour of the hill made it necessary to raise our heads and constantly stare at it. This again added to our increasing exhaustion. After a while we both used to put our heads down and violently strike our hands and legs, temporarily disregarding our landmark and hoping to head towards our destination. The results were off course journeys, out of the course by over 100 degrees. A good lot of energy and time were lost in correcting and continuing on the 'road' unknown. Only one motto we had in mind, "Keep trying." Again the routine continued. Raise the head and peer towards the hill and keep beating hands and legs—relax the neck a little, disregard the landmark and be off course. Sometimes Dikshit would shout out, "Karnik I don't think we are on the right course." Then we would stop our activity for a while and search around for our landmark. To our dismay we were heading exactly in the opposite direction. To correct ourselves and continue the journey was the only alternative. This happened again and again. The Great Natuna looked so close and remained so far.

Dikshit's life-jacket light was the only illumination in the vicinity. What magic was treasured even in the small lighted bulb. In the grim horror of pitch darkness, when the 'road' to the desired goal was unknown, it guided as a friendly support. The horror of darkness no more gripped at the heart. The rays of this small light became the rays of hope. The rays of light and hence the rays of hope shone full on us. Since our bodies were illuminated and visible to us the tie between us was stronger than the knot of the life-jacket straps.

Conversation was the best remedy to kill monotony. We became aware that it would be hours before we might be rescued or reach an island—if at all. Even if death was the destiny—it would be a slow agonizing death—through thirst starvation and exhaustion—and not just yet. The long hours of our joint struggle for survival naturally got us into conversation. We gave vent to our anger and bitterness at this dastardly work of killing innocents. It had taken the toll of fourteen lives till now. Should no greater misfortune befall us, Pathak, Dikshit and I knew that we should be living to tell the tale. The state of the last two persons afloat, we did not know, and now we were worried about them. I said to Dikshit, "I wish the aircraft had floated for just three minutes and I bet we could have saved them all." Dikshit merely said, "I wish so, too."

This was mere wishful thinking. An aircraft which could not fly straight cannot but meet the catastrophe of the *Kashmir Princess*. It was fortunate that someone was alive to unmask the otherwise shrouded mystery of such an air-crash to absolve the gallant pilot and the engineering department of any blame and to prevent a stain on the fine reputation of Air-India International and the growing popularity and prestige of India in the world. But to reveal that truth to the world we must keep afloat, we must live.

Dikshit and myself discussed at length the various incidents and the behaviour of the aircraft in flight after the explosion. He then said, "My wife and children are more than fortunate. If I was dead not only they would have lost me, but they would not have got any insurance compensation, because I haven't covered my insurance policy for aviation risk."

"Good Lord, Dickie," I said to him, "you should not have blundered this way. Now the first thing you

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are going to do when you get to Bombay is to have your policy comprehensively covered." He promised to do so.

I said to Dikshit later, "I am afraid the radio would announce the missing of the airplane and most probably we would be taken for dead. Our home people might undergo a torture for quite some time." My eyes were tear-filled. We did not talk for a while, thinking of our respective families . . . .

My father's diary read :

Poona—11th April 1955.

The radio was already tuned to Poona radio station. As the clock struck 9 o'clock, the radio began, "This is All-India Radio. You will now hear the news read by . . . ." The news from the radio was not being listened to with full attention. But all ears turned to it intently as it began, "An Air-India International Constellation on a flight from Hong Kong to Jakarta is feared to have been lost in the South China Sea, north of Sarawak. . . . ."

My family knew that Anant often used to go on flights. But we did not know for certain whether he was on this plane. Carefree talks about the arrangements of his forthcoming marriage were instantly eclipsed by grave anxiety. Everyone hoped that he was not on the airplane and yet feared the worst.

We then listened very attentively to the entire news bulletin. They waited for the names of the passengers and the crew. But the news broadcast ended without any such announcement. Anxiety had increased but nothing could have been done to relieve it at this hour. We all

prayed and hoped and worried. We resigned ourselves to wait until the morning newspapers bring out more details. We retired with a mixed feeling of uneasiness and anxiety."

Dikshit thought of his sons and his wife. To Bharatchandra the eldest son, he had promised a View-Master stereoscope on his return. Dikshit said, "I believe that a promise made to a child must be kept." I must get back home and take a View-Master for him.

In Bombay Capt. Nadkarni was trying to assure Dikshit's family of his safety. Nine-year old Bharatchandra kept saying that his father never tells a lie. He continued, "When Baba left for Hong Kong he said he will come back on Saturday. And so he will come back." He continued, "And do you know that this time he is going to bring me a View-Master ! Uncle, Nadkarni, will you come home again when Baba brings me the View-Master ? I will show you "Trip to Moon." Jubilantly he kept saying about his father's return unaware of the perils Dikshit was undergoing.

## NEWS FLASH

SINGAPORE, *April 11, 1955*

ELEVEN PASSENGERS comprising People's China officials and Pressmen bound for the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, and a crew of eight are feared to have perished in an Indian Constellation airliner "KASHMIR PRINCESS," which crashed in the sea North of Sarawak today.

The aircraft sent out three S.O.S. signals giving its position as 108 miles north of Kuching, Sarawak. The accident occurred soon after the Constellation sent out its distress signal at about I.S.T. 3 p.m. Eight minutes before the S.O.S. the plane signalled its position and gave no indication that it was in trouble. The cause of the crash is unknown. . . .

—*Indian Express*, Bombay.

NEW DELHI, *April 12, 1955*

IN A MESSAGE expressing his deep pain and distress at the disaster, the Prime Minister Mr. Nehru said: "At about 7 p.m. I first had news of the disaster to our Air-India International Constellation on its way to Jakarta from China. I was deeply shocked. At any time such a terrible disaster would have been very painful. On this particular occasion when it was carrying some members of the China delegation to the Bandung Conference, it was peculiarly painful and distressing. . . . This disaster has some very unusual features. Ten minutes before the aircraft fell into the sea we had a normal message from it. Something must have happened suddenly soon after. . . ."

## “You Sing or You Die”

DIKSHIT LOOKED at his watch. It showed past 9 o'clock. We had been in the water for over four hours. The whole world would have known by now that the *Kashmir Princess* had not reached Jakarta. It was now two hours over-due and must have been considered lost on the sea.

Dikshit then said “I wish Captain Jatar and Gloria are alive too. Jatar was so cool and courageous. And Gloria is the one to whom I owe my life. Brave girl. She put the jacket on me.” If Dikshit could come out from the cockpit, we thought, Jatar could have, too—provided he was unhurt, though not so obviously. Jatar was a stouter person and could not have come out from the window the way Dikshit came out. Besides with the great impact with which the aircraft hit the water one might easily hit his face against something solid, lose consciousness and die of drowning, if not immediately. Possibilities of getting away alive were remote, but not impossible. And of such a gallant and pleasant Captain as Jatar, we could not but hope that he should be alive.

Now I had time to reflect on the events preceding the crash. It was admirable courage on the part of every one in the aircraft. Jatar's quick decision to ditch the aircraft—an aircraft that was on fire, a wildly spreading one, with the imminent possibility of petrol-tank explosion. After the fire had commenced the aircraft could not fly straight. Jatar and Dikshit both fought fervently to keep the aircraft as straight as possible. Difficulties

kept mounting and the degree of danger grew. The spreading fire had brought with it the complete failure of the hydraulic system, and little before touching water, the fire had spread upto the third engine and right-hand cabin heater. This meant an extra strain on the two pilots. Failure of the hydraulic systems meant heavier pressure to work the aircraft controls and a dangerously fast landing speed. The spread of fire to No. 3 engine necessitated its stopping, worsening the flying condition of the aircraft. A worst combination of emergencies is yet to be recorded in any flight.

We kept beating our limbs ever trying to make for the shores of the Great Natuna island. All of a sudden we got into colder water. There was a marked difference in temperature. I said, "Dikshit, did you notice that we are now in colder water?"

"Colder water means deeper sea," said Dikshit. A shudder of terror passed through us. The deep sea. I hope not, I said to myself. Because of his broken collar-bone, Dikshit was in no condition to turn around to look for the shore of the Great Natuna. I was the one to whom this task was naturally entrusted. Dikshit's warning about the deep sea made me think harder whether the shores and islands around were mere hallucinations or there must be some other explanation for this colder water. I decided to wait for some more time rather than jump to conclusions. After a while I noticed that considerable efforts got us into the colder waters and a little relaxation somewhere at this point drifted us back into the warmer water, but the shores of Great Natuna remained just as distant. Hallucinations I ruled out. The final conclusion drawn was that a powerful cold-water current ran in the neighbourhood of the Great Natuna. So, I said to Dikshit and he agreed with me.

Over four hours of struggle had yielded no ground—or, rather, no water. We were hardly, making any headway. Dikshit said despairingly “Karnik, let us just float and rest. We are getting nowhere.” I wondered if we were tiring ourselves without any gain. Perhaps ultimately we might remain afloat, exhausted. To remain afloat effortlessly was very inviting—but dangerous. We might get into the colder water currents. I presumed that these, colder currents must be leading out into the open sea. Besides I knew that movement of the limbs kept even the ferocious variety of fish away. Whilst energy was still available with us, I did not want to become an easy prey to the monsters of the deep. Considering all this, I said to Dikshit, “Having been spared from the aircraft, it is no use dying now. I will only stop when I reach an island. If you are tired, you take some rest. But please do not ask me to stop. I will drag you to an island.” We both felt extremely tired by now. Dikshit suggested, “Let us sleep for some time, each in turn.” Admirably good idea, I thought. Then, on second thoughts, I rejected the idea. There was a danger of passing into coma. Without telling this to Dikshit, I told him to sleep while I remained awake and watchful. But sleep was impossible for him in that moment when our very life hung in a balance. The best he could do was to lie there—motionless, relax his muscles and try not to think of anything. With the least possible noise I kept moving my right arm only; eased out my feet to give them a break. I moved at a snail’s space, gently dragging Dikshit along with me. He asked, “Are you swimming, Karnik?” “No, Dickie,” I answered, “Not swimming, just trying to move with one arm. You take some more rest. I can’t stop now. I will only stop when we hit land.” I had barely finished saying this when Dikshit, with renewed vigour, even against my protestations, started on the journey again.

While swimming, I wondered from where we got

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such energy. With no sleep, food or water, what we were doing amazed me. Asked to do such endurance swimming under normal conditions—by normal conditions I mean given proper food and rest, with people to rescue around—I would have given up long before. The answer to the riddle was the will to live. Never before had I thought the will to live to be so strong as to surmount such terrible odds.

We were swinging forwards and backwards. We were not strong enough to break through the powerful cold water current. There was little hope of reaching land. Swimming was extremely painful. To lay afloat, idle, was tempting. Yet there was not the slightest desire to do so. Dikshit said, "It will be a pity to die now, once we have got away alive from the aircraft." I said to him, "It will be very sad, indeed. But I am confident that our energies will last at least till sunrise, and by then there is bound to be some help."

The time was about 9-30 p.m. To keep us swimming till next day's sunrise, meant about nine more hours of life-and-death struggle, should any help come by then. Hope for help we must, and yet be not too optimistic, to expect it sooner than it would come. We must also be prepared for the hard, cold possibility that an aerial search might be carried out in some wrong location, leaving us to our ultimate destiny.

I was trying to be optimistic about our strength to persevere. Dikshit was hopeful of a rescue. He said, "I hope some search airplane comes soon." And what thrill we had, what hopes, when we heard the unmistakable drone of a distant airplane. Dikshit's face brightened up with joy. Perhaps we would soon be back to humanity—meet our relatives, friends and well-wishers. How anxiously must they be waiting! Hoping against hope that we should be back. This must be the wish of the relatives and friends of every crew member and passenger in the

aircraft. The droning sound grew louder, and soon right overhead, we saw the red and blue wing-tip lights of the airplane. This airplane had two additional red lights on its belly and this indicated that it was on a special flight. In the pitch darkness around, the only visible light for the airplane was the light from Dikshit's life-jacket.

The airplane, we expected, would circle around or come down looking for survivors. It did nothing of the sort, and flew away straight in the north eastern direction. We both felt bitter at our miserable misfortune and were annoyed that the airplane should have gone away without even circling once. I was amazed that Dikshit's life-jacket light was so completely disregarded. In sheer bitterness, I said to Dikshit, "We should not expect too much. I guess we will have to reach the island on our own."

It had become a routine matter to navigate with the help of the hill in front. Dikshit's life-jacket light hurt badly the eyes, they being so close. All the time I was praying that some bright, recognisable stars might come up in the heavens. As darkness grew denser, some distance above the western horizon there appeared the lovely constellation of Orion. It was far too low and hence not of any practical use to us. Half an hour later this friendly objective in the sky too had deserted us and vanished below the western horizon. But soon Jupiter appeared right above us with two little stars unknown to me and formed a perfect triangular pattern, its head towards the Great Natuna.

Many a night later, sprawled on the lawn in front of our house, I watched this trio in the sky and was lost in the fearful memories of this dreadful night. What luck was it, I thought, that Jupiter, the largest planet, would some day guide me towards life. It whirled in the far distant space, moving at phenomenal speed.

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Yes, Jupiter was moving at phenomenal speed. But to us it appeared hung up in the sky, along with its two partners, just for our guidance. A heavenly boon, we thought. With joy I pointed out to Dikshit, "Look at the triangle with Jupiter on the left. It is pointing towards the shore."

"By Jove, yes," said Dikshit, "We do not have to stare hard at the dim hills any more," Dikshit's life-jacket light would no more hurt us. We could, for the first time, lay our heads low reducing the strain on our necks. This gave us little more speed, too.

I used to peer with casual curiosity at the stars in the sky. Never had I dreamt that some day I would be using this scanty knowledge of astronomy to save my life.

Now that our speed had increased, there was renewed hope of reaching the Great Natuna sooner. The swimming from warm to cold water and back from cold to warm continued. Our energies were not great enough to force our way through the powerful currents. Whilst battling in the currents we would reach the limit of our endurance, rest a little and were thrown back to where we started. During our rest period Dikshit would ask for the remaining distance. I knew pretty well that we were hardly making any progress, so did Dikshit. Mutually agreeing on it would have meant giving up the struggle, so I decided to differ, to keep up our spirits. Dikshit's queries I would answer mostly by my usual answer. "Only a hundred yards," to which he once remarked, "Your hundred yards seem so far." Sometimes I would give a vague answer, "Only a short distance." The distance unquestionably was short, but it seemed to be strongly hedged by the agencies of death.

Now once again we were in the midst of the unfriendly

cold water current, taking a bit of rest. Dikshit asked me to listen for the sound of bird-twitter. Intently, I was all ears for the sound—and there it was. “That means the island is close by,” said Dikshit. If we were within hearing distance of tiny little birds, we surely must be within easy reach of the island. And Pathak surely must have reached the island. I hoped that he did not lie unconscious on the beach. Dikshit hoped that he might find some aid to rescue us. I did not feel optimistic. We had already lost sight of the other two persons whom we had not seen since sundown. The bird-twitter was just another ray of hope in the realms of darkness we were floating in.

This twittering noise was so faint as to be discernible only when we were motionless. The moment we started beating our hands and legs it was drowned in the splashing noise we made. Now we made a frightening discovery. Our life-jackets had become considerably soft. More than half of their air had leaked out. We took some rest, away from the currents, inhaled a deep breath and blew in through the tube provided for mouth inflation. A tingle of fear passed through my spine. Should this leak worsen, later we might be in such an exhausted condition as to be unable to inflate the jackets. To inflate it we had to blow a pressure greater than that existing in the jacket. Once our reserve of energy came to an end and the air in the jacket betrayed us by leaking out, we would sink and join the others in their watery grave below.

The lure of the bird-twitter continued for some more time. Once we happened to rest away from currents, and even here the twitter was distinctly audible. This made us think a little harder. But even the twittering could not lessen the peril represented by the leaking life-jacket. We hastily searched around for the air leak and

traced it at a point where the compressed air bottle was connected to the jacket through a valve. To prevent the air leaking out sooner, with my left palm I covered and pressed on the leaking spot. This was an extra burden on my energy. I had to choose between preventing the leak or blowing in oftener. I could not completely stop the leak this way. Only the time interval extended between blowing.

I had half a mind of suggesting Dikshit of changing our intended destination and swim in the opposite direction towards the island with the big hill. (Later I learned that he too had the same inclination). We could not pluck courage to lose the distance already gained, if any. And cold currents were likely to be around every island. We did not think that the gamble was worth the while. I had tied the jacket around me in such a great hurry that its straps were tied about four inches above the waist, instead of at the waist. It became loosely floating around me, its top discomforting my head and its straps digging into my ribs. I kept complaining to Dikshit that there must be something wrong with the life-jacket. It was only hours later when I passed my right hand around my head that I knew from the traces of blood, that I had a cut on my skull. Since the injury did not hurt me too severely I knew that it must be a superficial one. At the spot where the strap was hurting me on my right ribs, there was a big burned patch, but I learnt it only when we were safe on the ship *Dampier*.

The loose life-jacket around the neck kept hitting on the chin and on the knot of the tie which caused momentary choking. With great difficulty, during one of our rest intervals, I managed to free my neck of the strangling tie. I was about to throw it away, when an idea occurred to me. I wrapped it around the leaky spot of my life-jacket to give rest to my palm.

By now we were exhausted. The only fuel to our labouring bodies was rest. Now and then, out of sheer necessity, we had to resort to this refuelling. Very effective it was, too. Our entire strategy lay in fight, then rest, and fight again until once again we were compelled to rest our limbs.

It is amazing how soon monotony creeps into any routine, even in a life and death struggle. Except for our occasional chat there was only the routine of 'swim and rest, rest and swim' lay open to us. During one such rest-period, I was surprised by Dikshit's question : "Karnik, can you sing ? "

"What did you say ? " I asked.

"Can you sing, man ? "

"Good heavens, no," I replied, "Not except when I am under a shower in my bath."

"Well, then," he said, "imagine you are under a shower now and sing—sing any thing—to relieve the deadly tedium of this eternal sea-bath we are having—or any moment I may give up this struggle and go to sleep—perhaps for ever."

I saw the point of his suggestion. Years ago I had read of an incident described by an American war-correspondent who was flying in Russia in a Red Army plane along with the Soviet Foreign Minister, Vyshinsky. The temperature was far below zero and every one in the 'plane was in danger of being frozen to death when Vyshinsky got a brain-wave. He invited the American reporter to have a boxing match with him to keep them warm and help their blood circulation, as the plane roared

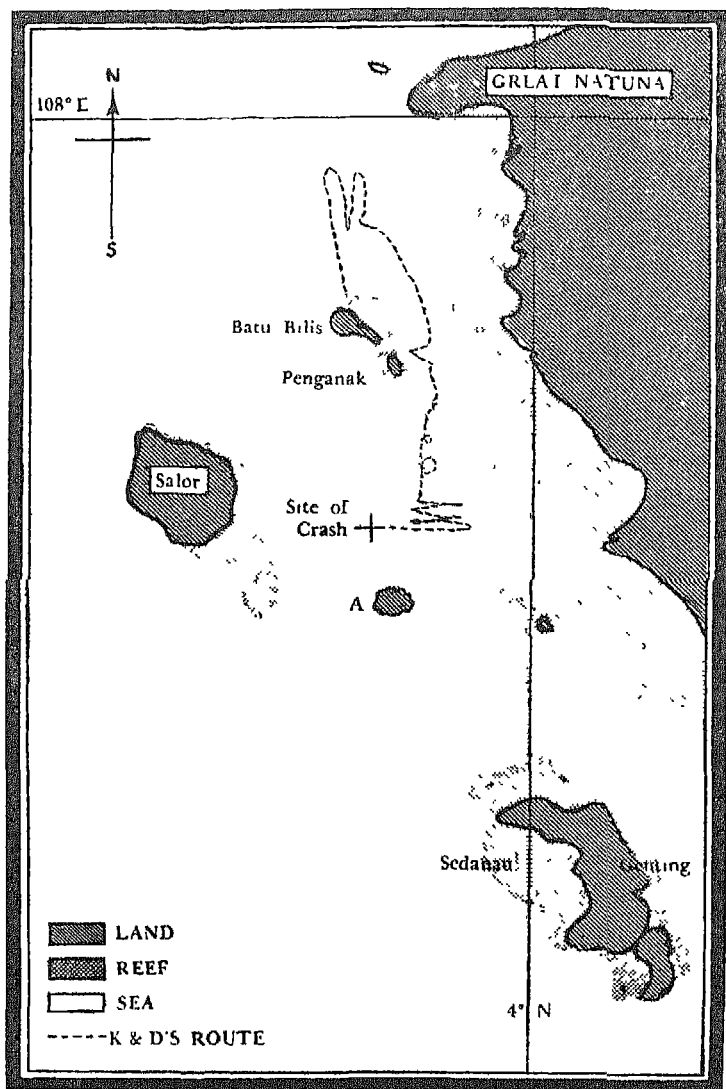
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through a snow-storm. According to the correspondent, those fisticuffs in the air saved his life and the lives of all others in the plane who quickly followed suit and started hitting each other.

Well, I told myself, if in an emergency a dignified Foreign Minister can have a boxing match with a reporter, then in a similar situation, even I can sing.

And so the dark South China Sea rang with my unmusical rendering of a song.

To this day I don't know whether it was the inspiration of my song or sheer disgust with my unmusical voice that did the trick. But the song had hardly ended when Dikshit was peddling away with renewed vigour.



'A' indicates the island intended to reach initially

## The Cruel Sea and the Kind Storm

THE SMALL clouds that hung on the eastern horizon by now had advanced and, though scattered, covered the entire sky. Even the hill-tops were obscured by the shifting clouds. Occasionally Jupiter, with its companion stars, would peer out through gaps in the dark small clouds, and would warn us of our wrong direction. Its occasional glimpse would help us steer on the chosen course. These small clouds formed a massive assemblage on the East side. It was as if a mass-meeting was to be held at a late hour on the eastern horizon and flocks of clouds were steadily traversing from West to East. A Bandung Conference in the sky, I thought, and wondered if someone was planning a sabotage in the heavens, too.

The gathering clouds on the East were slowly transforming from individual patches to a dark spreading smoke-sheet across the wide sky. Dikshit once again glanced at his watch. It was faithfully recording the time-lapse. He knew it was nearly time for moon-rise. But it was of no avail. It would be beyond the opaque cloudy curtain. Not only the moon would be invisible, but Jupiter, too, would be screened. Perhaps we may never see it again. Destiny seemed to be cruel and hard. What little chances we had of navigating with the help of either the hills or stars were snatched away from us. Pessimism was slowly creeping back into my mind.

What stars governed, I wondered, the destiny of the nineteen that left Hong Kong this noon. Nine Chinese

delegates, one Polish and one Austrian correspondent, and the crew of eight. Fourteen already dead, and the five struggling in the water—who feared a watery grave might await them too !

Whilst thus our fate hung by a thread above the vast watery death, Dikshit shouted, “Look at that light. It is Morse. He is flashing Morse.” There was a torch-light—a very dim one—towards our west. I peered hard at it to make sure it could be Morse. Dikshit kept shouting. “It is Morse. Only Jatar can flash Morse. It must be Jatar. I cannot read the signals because of the waves.” On our plane only three persons knew Morse—Jatar, Dikshit and Pathak. That is how Dikshit felt certain it was Jatar. I thought it was nothing but the waves that made a steady light appear as a flash and not that the waves hindered the reading of flashed Morse. I knew that it was Dikshit’s affection for Jatar that made him think that it was Morse, and hence the person to be Jatar. Between wave crests we saw the light for a full minute or two.

About five minutes later, to our right, in the northerly direction, another, dim steady torch light was visible. This person was obviously very much closer to Great Natuna’s shores. We felt certain that this one would very soon reach the island. A surge of happiness bubbled in our minds, that the last two persons afloat of whom we had not known anything for a long time, were still alive. We hoped and prayed that all of us should get to this island very soon. As if in answer to our prayer, about 200 yards on the South we saw a moderately powerful torch lit up, and an instant later by its side either a small searchlight or a very powerful torch shot out its beams in our direction.

For a moment we were dazzled to see such brilliance in the unbounded arid darkness. Dikshit and I

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reacted differently to these lights. We both knew that the exceptionally brilliant light was not from one of the floating persons. It was unquestionably alien. Dikshit was certain that someone from the neighbouring islands had come to rescue us. Perhaps Pathak had reached the Great Natuna and sought the aid of some fishermen. Many a story I had heard of how saboteurs and their accomplices destroy evidence of their crime. I had a lingering fear in my mind that it would be a boat, equipped with searchlights and machine guns, belonging to the same agencies that had kept the bomb in the airplane. The airplane had burnt, completely shattered and sunk. The only possible shreds of evidence would be the survivors floating if they had not already been a prey to the monstrous sharks. All these thoughts could be just wild fancy. Dikshit's explanation seemed more plausible. He raised his left arm and waved and asked me to wave mine, too. Only for an instant I hesitated, then I raised my right hand and waved. Both those distant lights, though clearly visible to us, could not reach us. It is not likely they could have seen our hands in the dim light of only one life-jacket light. Yet at that time I felt certain that our light must have been visible to them. Then why did they not come to rescue us? Were we given up as mere floating corpses? We never would know. The lights did not appear again.

Perhaps the persons with the powerful lights had bolted seeing the gathering fury in the sky. Rescue work at such a time would have meant endangering the lives of those in the boats. More people may die of drowning than those that could be saved. Saviours may vanish with the unfortunate floating souls. Prudently, they had beaten a hurried retreat.

The fury in the sky was expressing itself in the form

of lightning and thunder. From nowhere massive dark clouds had sprung up fast, covering the entire sky. Now we felt we were in an abyss, cut off from every thing in the world—even the stars, the hills, the islands—everything except each other and the lashing waves hitting at our sides. Even Dikshit's life-jacket light deserted us, increasing the frightful darkness around. The gale was blowing in with an eerie whistling sound, raising the waves higher and higher. We were being tossed from wave to wave. We had stopped swimming. It was no use. The sea had grown rough and any attempt to swim would have been futile. We were lifted high up and dropped down by the waves, pushed from side to side every second. The tossing waves, we were worried, might push us out into the dreadful open sea. Once we were in the open sea, there would not be the ghost of a chance to live. Bigger waves and bigger fish. No island near-by. If we remained alive till the morning, a search party would not even dream of our being drifted so far from the scene of the crash.

A streak of lightning would spit out from the devilish clouds, illuminating the frightful black panorama around just for a fraction of a second. We would get a glimpse of the islands around, and the mounting anxiety would ease out for a while, that we were still at the epicentre of the islands. There was hope to live. Cold, strong wind was blowing. The water had become a little colder, too. Instinctively we drew closer to each other. I passed my left arm around Dikshit's back and he his right arm around my back, thus holding our bodies in closer contact. The portions of our bodies in contact with each other's were warmer than the exposed ones. All the available heat we must preserve for further attempts, should the storm subside and we still have an island within sight.

Lightning and thunder ceased. The gruesome dark

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night sprawled in every direction. Normally even on a pitch dark night, a hill or any distant object is discernible by its faint peripheral contours. But here nothing was visible. No contour of the hill ; no trace of the islands. All that we were aware of was the mercilessly splashing waves that would break at our sides and give us a spray of the salty water, which smarted our eyes. If the wave was bigger, its spray was big enough to force its way into the mouth. We spat it out. Sometimes when we opened our mouths to spit out the water, a powerful wave splashed so hard, that it covered our faces. Instead of spitting out the water, more salt water found its way into the stomach. I prayed that this nasty storm would subside soon or else we might die of drowning (through drinking excessive quantities of salt water) even while afloat.

The storm persisted. We were being tossed up and down and God knows where; probably towards the open sea, far away from the islands. There was nothing we could physically do ; just keep floating. We clinged on to the little life-jacket around our neck. Our lives depended entirely on these yellow life-savers and air was leaking out of both of them. My neck-tie was still on the leaking spot. I held it tight with my right palm to minimise the leak.

From time to time I kept feeling the air pressure inside the jacket. It was getting softer. I could minimise the air leak, but could not stop it altogether. If mine was getting softer, so must be Dikshit's too. The jackets would continue to grow soft, and softer and softer, with less and less of the life-saving air. How long will it hold us ? There were no signs of the stormy fury abating. And whilst the storm continued we could not possibly attempt blowing in any air in the jacket. The risk was too great. During such an attempt, in all probability, a considerable

amount of air may actually leak out. The moment the inflation tube is pressed, water might gush into the mouth and result in letting out air. It was a hazardous task, to be attempted only as a last resort. It would be better to attempt and sink, than not attempt and sink.

Cessation of lightning and thunder gave way to rain. A downpour of heavy water drops began hitting at our face and drumming heavily on the air-filled life-jackets. We closed our eyes and bore this attack patiently. Despite the discomfort the rain caused us, a happy idea flashed in our minds. We could have some water to drink—a few drops of fresh water would soothe the throat enormously, would enliven us to renew the battle for survival with greater vigour and for longer duration. Hopefully I opened my mouth and in rushed a splashing wave that nearly choked me up. I spat out all the salt water I could and recovered from this unexpected attack. With greater caution I made two more attempts to catch a few of the rain-drops, but in vain. Then I tried greedily to lick a rain-drop that had fallen on my lip and was about to trickle away. But the salt water spray would dilute the rain-drop to such an extent that it tasted as brackish as sea-water. Disappointed we shut our eyes, mouths and minds to the rain. Even a drop of water was denied to us. Like the cannibals dancing with shouts around their prey, the rain made us feel its merciless presence by beating against our jackets, as if the unruly death-drum was being beaten to the dance of the waves.

The drifting waves pushed us on and on—we did not know where. Since nothing was visible in the pitch darkness around, there was nothing that we could usefully do. We had closed our eyes and were in a state of complete resignation, only hoping that the storm would subside soon. We distinctly felt our moving round and round in

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a circle. Heavens, fear clutched at my throat. Whirlpool ! A positive drowning end, I thought. I was somehow hesitant to speak to Dikshit. Just then he himself said to me, "Karnik, I think we are moving in a circle. Don't you think so ? "

I replied in the affirmative. Having got the confirmation, I began frantically beating my right leg to get out of the whirlpool. We were only at the fringe of the whirlpool. So I managed to extricate ourselves away from it. But the moment we ceased our activity, back again we were in the same whirling current. Dikshit was appalled by my sudden and unexpected activity and when I tried again to swim out of the whirlpool, he assured me that the whirlpools in the sea are not at all dangerous. I regained my composure and lay motionless, even felt happy that we were in a whirlpool. At least we would be in a localized spot, which reduced the danger of drifting into the unfathomable open sea.

Thus we lay on the water, without any thought or without any activity, floating, even relaxing, as we drifted round and round. We did not realize when we got out of the whirlpool. The wind had died away. Tossing of the waves had lessened. I was nearly in a semi-coma, from which Dikshit roused me, saying excitedly, "Look at the right. What's that ? " I opened my eyes and saw a totally new world. A bright moon shone high up in the sky. Silvery glittering water.

Tiny little wavelets danced in a joyous mood. There was not even a trace of the storm. Thin transparent clouds patched the sky here and there. And on our right lay a new hope of life, a small island thickly covered with palm trees. A surge of joy rose in our hearts. The Great Natuna and the hills in front, where we struggled

fruitlessly before the storm, for nearly four hours, were no longer in sight. We thanked heavens for the storm it sent. It shifted us to new hopeful regions and, for over an hour, gave the vitally needed rest to our aching limbs. We looked around for Pathak and others. Not a soul was in sight. We were confident that Pathak must have reached the Great Natuna, the others probably had reached some of the islands.

Our life-jackets had become so soft that nearly half of the air from each had leaked out. We marvelled at their ability to keep us afloat. After the long rest we felt fresh and full of vigour. We blew into our jackets to make them taut, so we would not have to refill for a considerable length of time. We got ready once again for the routine, certain of reaching the small palm-fringed island. One, two, three—and away we were. The island could not have been more than half a mile distant. With new hope in our hearts, and new energy in our limbs, feverishly we were beating our arms and legs in an attempt to reach land in the shortest possible time. After about half an hour of continuous struggle, we paused to look around. We shuddered at the knowledge of the grim reality. It was the repetition of the struggle to reach the Great Natuna. We became aware that every island was encircled by the deadly cold water-currents. In the past half an hour we had made no headway. We were wondering whether it was worth exhausting ourselves. We might as well remain floating until in the morning someone fishes us out. We did not have much time for musing. Breathlessly we beheld, in front of us, what we had been dreading ever since we were aware of the water-currents—the vast open sea. So frightful it looked, its jaws wide open, horizon to horizon, awaiting us to slip down its throat. In desperate search we glanced around for some refuge. To our delight, a new island had sprung close behind us. In

an instant we knew what had happened. We were caught in the cold water-currents and drifted into the open sea, but with another island directly behind us.

This was our last chance for survival failing which death due to thirst, starvation and exposure was certain. Besides we had drifted far away from the scene of the crash and were not likely to be searched for in this region. With determined vigour, urgency and fury we worked our hands and feet that for the first time our labour yielded gratifying rewards. Excited with the result, we increased our pace. A small hillock on the island grew larger. The sand on the shore shone brightly in the brilliant moonlight. A little over a hundred yards more, and we should be in permanent safety and security.

We had over-estimated our energies. At the end of seven and a half hours of life-and-death struggle we should not have expected too much of ourselves. The inevitable result of such a hurried run was that we were completely out of breath, exhausted to such an extent that we could not raise our hands for a single more stroke. Must rest for a while. After all we had come close to the island, only about a hundred yards remaining. There was no need to hurry. We had made it. We momentarily closed our eyes not in ecstasy of delight but to regain our strength. We knew that not only the currents, but the ebbing tide too was pushing us away from the islands.

At that moment, we felt we had enough breath for this last lap, we gauged the distance. We were pushed back once again from where we had commenced for this island. It could no more discourage us. We knew that hadn't we hurried too much on the last attempt we should have reached the shore. At the same time we were acutely aware of our waning stock of energy. It

wouldn't last for ever. Anyway, we must make the best of it, while it lasts. We agreed that on this final attempt there would be no talking and no stopping. Every breath shall be used to swim. We shall stop either when we hit land or when we get completely exhausted. And the most important thing, beat our hands and feet at a steady pace, not too slow, yet never too fast.

In perfect synchronism, like a mechanical toy we kept moving on and on. Not even once did it lure us to turn and look behind at the approaching island. Not a single pause we could risk. We did not care much for drift, either. We held the moon in front of us as a guide. We knew we could drift a lot. But at worst instead of reaching the island squarely in front we might come up on the sides. It was better to come on to the sides than never come in the vicinity of the island. We didn't know how long we kept swimming this lap—must be about half an hour. Probably another half an hour to go. We kept going at a steady pace.

All of a sudden my right hand touched something solid. At once I gripped it. Unmistakably a rock. With joy I shouted aloud without releasing my grip on the rock, "Dikshit, we have made it ! Here is a rock." For a moment Dikshit could not believe it. The rock was on my right and hence he couldn't come on it unless I climbed on to it and made room for him. Eagerly he kept saying, "Where is it ? Where is it ?" I perched myself on one side of the rock and pulled Dikshit on to it. What a relief to our exhausted limbs. Solid rock stood under our feet. Breathing heavily through exhaustion, we looked smilingly at each other.

"We live," we said almost simultaneously. We live to be back with our families ! It hardly struck us that

#### THE CRUEL SEA AND THE KIND STORM

everyone at home must be worried with anxiety, whether we were coming back at all. They all must have been hoping against hope. Praying that we should return. How lucky we were !

## Crusoes of the Coral Islands

DIKSHIT SUGGESTED that we should immediately get on to the beach. I was content to remain where we were. I said, "Let us spend the remaining night on the rock." He looked at his watch—a superb machine, still working after nine hours of salt-water bath ; it was just past 1-30 a.m. local. He explained to me that it was low tide then and by morning the rock would be submerged with the high tide. I pleaded that we should rest on the rock for about half an hour to which he gladly consented. From a distance it seemed that water spread right up to the beach. Fortunately, however, the last hundred yards or so were dotted with rocks. Had it been deep water, it was doubtful whether we could have been able to swim any further, so exhausted were we.

After about a quarter of an hour later, we recovered sufficiently to resume our journey to the golden glittering beach. We undid the knot which had till now faithfully kept us together and while doing so Dikshit said, "Now we become twins, Karnik."

"Well, yes," said I, "We will celebrate 12th of April, every year as our birth-day."

I tried to get up and found that my legs just couldn't bear the weight of my body, especially because it was a rocky, uneven terrain. Dikshit too couldn't walk without a support. The rocks were covered with slippery, velvety vegetation. The water above them, about a foot high,

was very clear and the moon beams were reflected in it. This helped me to crawl on my hands. Dikshit didn't like the slippery moss. He said it gave him a feeling of holding a live fish in his hand. He supported himself by placing his left arm on my right shoulder. I managed to sit on a rock, feel the next rock by one of my feet, then by pressing my hands, lift myself on to the next. Once or twice Dikshit went ahead and lost his balance, and with difficulty managed to support himself on his left arm. "Dickie, stay as you are, I am coming to you." Thus saying I crawled to him as hurriedly as I could. Then he said, "I think there are crabs here." "Crabs, Goodness ! I get more terrified by crabs than sharks."

"I know it is silly, but I can't help that," I said. Just then I pushed forward my left foot to feel for a rock, I felt a bite on my toe. I shrieked, "A crab has bitten me." I pulled my foot out of the water. Had it been a crab, it should have been hanging at my toe. It was a thorny bush. I pulled it off. Most of the thorns broke away. We became a little more careful not to have too many thorns in our feet. All the same, just as a precaution, I kept beating the water with my hand to drive away the crabs, if any, before stepping further. This ultra-precaution amused Dikshit, which I could clearly discern in the bright moonlight from the half-concealed smile on his face.

It occurred to us now that our life-jackets were still inflated and causing quite some discomfort while thus moving. So we halted to release the air, folded them and tied them to our backs. Movements became much more comfortable now. Dikshit's humour, with his ever-smiling face, was once again bubbling at the surface. He said, "I say, Karnik, your shirt is wet."

I turned round to him in amazement, "Isn't yours too?"

He said, "of course it is."

"Then why did you say mine was wet."

"I was merely making an observation."

We continued our new routine, beating the water, feeling for rocks and then stepping forward. After nearly two hours we came to the end of the rocks. It was no more necessary for me to crawl on my hands. I could raise myself on my feet, though they hurt me a lot, and walk very slowly over the plain sandy sea-bed, in knee-deep water. We had to cross only about twenty yards to get on to dry beach. Tiny ripples spread all over the water, and every ripplet-crest shone like a knife-edge. Suddenly my eye caught sight of a massive, crocodile-like creature, moving about ten yards from us. I clutched Dikshit's hand and said "Look, there is a crocodile." I was frightened. All the same I bent down to pick up a stone. If it be a crocodile it must open its mouth for an attack. I intended hitting the stone inside its mouth. Only after Dikshit's persuasion and assurance that crocodiles do not stay in sea-water, that I plucked up courage, threw away the stone and released my hard clutch on him. He pulled me by the arms near the imaginary crocodile. It was only a zig-zag sea weed, which appeared moving, due to the waves. Just then we heard the drone of an airplane and, very high above us, in the cloudless moonlit sky saw a Dakota smoothly sailing. Soon it vanished.

Having been washed ashore on a lonely island, our thoughts naturally turned to the immediate future.

"I don't think any one lives on this island," said Dikshit.

I agreed with him.

"How long do you think we could live here?"

"Indefinitely, I suppose," I suggested.

"How about food and water?"

"Nothing to worry. Look, so many coconut trees. Coconuts for dinner, breakfast and lunch. And water, of course, from the coconuts."

And then the Robinson Crusoe in me awakened, and I said, "If no one comes looking for us within a fortnight or so, we will start making a boat and sail to Singapore."

Dikshit didn't laugh. Perhaps he couldn't treat the matter as lightly as I was doing. His sons, wife and aged parents would be worried to death by then. Seeing him so grave I thought of my *fiancée* and parents and other family members waiting for me. And to cheer both of us I said that by morning a fisherman's boat was bound to turn up. We both felt somewhat relieved by the prospects of rescue.

The time was 3-30 a.m. Soon we were on the dry beach. We untied our jackets and threw them on the sand, turned around and looked at the sea. Calm and smiling and friendly, it appeared now. We looked if the two unknown persons could be behind us, trying to reach the same island. But there was no sign of life around. The sea stretched in front of us, and an island in the distance was clearly visible. We hoped that the two persons might be on that other island. Of Pathak, an excellent swimmer, we were certain that he would be on the Great Natuna.

We were exhausted from the past nine hours' activity, and were badly in need of rest. Dikshit suggested that we should move up to a sheltered place. But I was not prepared to move a step further, even though he warned, that the sands would move away when the water came up. I resolved to stay there. I helped Dikshit sit down. He was in great pain, while making any movement, due to his broken collar bone. My injured legs hurt me badly, whenever I tried to help him to rise or lie down, yet not so badly as to be unbearable. He suggested then, that I should set his broken bone. I was scared that, being inexperienced I would hurt him. Then, at his request and directions, I pulled his right arm away and behind his back, to keep the broken ends of his bones separated.

Wet clothes were our next worry. I pulled off my shirt and tried to squeeze the water from it. But alas, there was no strength in my hands. Not a drop I was able to squeeze out. I tried to wave the shirt to and fro in an attempt to dry it. That way it would have taken me a full night to dry it, so I put it back and we both lay down on the flattened-out life-jackets on the sand, Dikshit on my right. It was cold and we couldn't sleep, but we lay there, resting our tired and aching bodies. Dikshit was moaning with pain and shivering from cold. I tried to keep him warm by rubbing his body with my palms. Then I slept for some time covering his chest with my face and left hand.

About an hour after we laid ourselves on the beach a strong cold wind started blowing, which chilled us to our bones. We were compelled to take refuge elsewhere. After searching a little we chose a spot near a bushy hedge, at the foot of a stubby little coconut tree. The wind managed to sneak around the trees, which did not offer much refuge. I was worried that we were in wet clothes

and had wet bodies; this cold wind might give us pneumonia or plain high fever. Should such a catastrophe befall us we would be completely helpless; we would be unable even to find food and drink. After escaping the terrors of the deep we might die of fever, thirst and starvation.

Sleep was not possible under such circumstances. I sat up beside Dikshit on his left. He had merely kept his eyes closed and was complaining of the miserable cold wind. I looked around. A number of coconut tree leaves were lying around. I rose and dragged some of the leaves, one by one, though I could barely pull them—my legs hurting me beyond endurance. Placing these leaves on the right side of Dikshit, from where the wind was blowing, one above the other, a barricade about three feet high was thus formed, which somewhat sheltered us from the wind. I was determined to make a better barricade. But Dikshit was already displeased at my labouring alone. The wind was considerably cut down due to the improvised barricade, and I had to give up further attempts as he wouldn't let me.

We talked for a while. Suddenly our attention was focussed on the big coconuts hanging from the stubby tree we were sleeping under. Dikshit said, half humorously, "It will be a pity if we die here with a coconut hit." I then suggested that we cover our face with our hands, since the tree was very short.

A little later, my attention was arrested by the brightly lit-up tree-tops above us. A surge of joy ran through me, and excitedly I told Dikshit that there must be a water pond just behind us. The moonbeams from behind were reflected by the pond on to the trees. Dikshit was too tired to express any joy, and passed into peaceful slumber, for he was snoring soon. I was too tired and chilled to

## KASHMIR PRINCESS

sleep ; yet too tired to think. Vacantly I kept gazing at the waving tree leaves above and the patch of the sky visible through them. Soon after I must have passed into slumber myself.

## “Killers?”

WHEN I woke up, Dikshit was still sleeping soundly, and I noticed that his little black beard looked funny on his youthful face. It was bright daylight and the high-tide water had advanced to only a few feet away from us. It was fortunate for us that the cold wind had started blowing in the middle of the night and we were forced to take refuge here. Or else, we would once again have been soaked in sea water. We had already had enough of it. I sat up and looked around. Greenish-blue water, rippled in the bright red light of the dawn. Yonder lay a small island, gay and smiling, as if refreshed after a night full of sleep. Dampness filled the cool morning breeze—no more biting. It was excessively damp around us, almost wet, from heavy dew-fall. Dikshit was still asleep. My throat was dry from thirst. I must have some water. The moonlight reflected on the tree tops, I recalled. Leaving Dikshit alone, for I knew that on this uninhabited island there was no danger at all, I rose to look for the pond. I walked up slowly upto the hedgy bush in my wet shirt and short underwear, my blood-stained legs fully exposed, I looked beyond. I got a shock of dismay. There was no pond of water. The island's width was too narrow and the reflection was of the sea water from the beach on the other side.

I walked hopefully forward and tried to look for fallen coconuts. The storm was there the previous night. Some ripe coconuts might have dropped on the ground. The sand was littered with tiny hard nuts which were entirely

hard shells, containing neither water nor edible crust. I then thought of using these hard nuts as projectiles to bring down the green coconuts. I made a vain ridiculous attempt. For, soon I became aware of my physical incapacity. I had not much strength in my arms, and my legs could take no reaction of the throw. The hard shells I threw hardly went up about ten feet in the air.

Since my feet could hardly bear my weight, it was unlikely I could climb up a coconut tree. Never had I attempted climbing one before. But now in this emergency, attempt I must. Scores of trees all around were full of fruit; and every fruit must be full of sweet water inside. Throat and stomach dictated that I must climb a tree. As I was looking for a suitable tree I noticed that some trees had steps cut into them. Though the island was uninhabited, it must have been frequented by someone, possibly to collect the coconuts. We could afford to be lazier. All thoughts of making a boat could be abandoned. No more Robinson Crusoes. We were bound to be rescued within a month or two or perhaps after three or four. The steps cut in the trees brought safety within sight. That was for the future. Thirst started pinching badly in the throat and the stomach started convulsing with hunger. Water was needed urgently. I walked a little further around the curvature of the island, leaving Dikshit out of sight, and came to a curved tree. The tree not being up-right, I thought I could crawl on it, partly supporting myself by my stomach. Also the tree due to its curvature at its root, had projected out into the sea; so, should I have a fall, it would be in the sea with lesser consequent damage. When I reached within a few feet of this tree, I noticed that it was infested with big red ants, streaming up and down. They would surely sting me to death. If I could burn down or smoke them, I could easily bring down the coconuts, not more than twenty feet high. Fire

### “KILLERS ?”

and smoke. Wonderful idea. But to start them? I turned back to the hedge where a number of small white stones were scattered. But they were soaked with the morning dew; so were the leaves and shrubs and palm-leaves. Smoke and fire were out of the question. I returned to the tree and was about to pull off my shirt to brush away the ants with it, when I heard someone shouting “Ho-ya, Ho-ya !” I turned around to see who was calling me. It could not be Dikshit, for the shouts were of more than one person and emanated from the direction opposite to where I had left my friend. I stood there on my guard, and didn’t have to wait for long for the mystery to unveil. From the turning at the north end of the island, four persons with somewhat Chinese features, appeared. Two of them wore large checked shirts, and, wrapped around their waists, *lungies*, and carried in their hands blunt blades, about 20 inches long, similar to those used for grass cutting. The other two were in plain shirts and trousers, and had black velvety caps on their heads. I shuddered. “Killers,” I thought, they couldn’t have come for our rescue. Had they been on this lonely island, why hadn’t they rescued us from the sea last night? Why had they allowed us to struggle against fate, in the dangerous waters, for nearly a full night? Why did they carry those grim-looking blades in their hands? I remembered the powerful search-light. I felt certain that these must be the accomplices of the same agency that had blown our aeroplane, now out to destroy the last shred of evidence of their dastardly crime. I started walking back to Dikshit, as fast as I could, but I couldn’t walk fast. The distance between the four men and me was being reduced, with every step of retreat.

What a horrible death it would be ! Hacked to bits under such helpless condition. Fight I will. But how? Against four able bodied armed brutes? Impossible. I

could imagine that in a few minutes the merciless attack would start, we would bleed profusely, probably get unconscious under severe pain and soon breathe our last breath. But I was thinking of taking a fighting chance. At least, make it harder for them. Give them too, a taste of death, if I could. Yes, the small hard nut-shells could be very useful. I thought of arming myself with a few. Hurl them hard into the faces of the attackers. No, it would be better to attack one of the persons carrying the killing blade. Snatch it from him and attack the whole lot of them. I bent down to pick up the nuts. Half way down, a change of plan struck me. Dikshit was lying down, incapable of any resistance. Four against one person! Ridiculous idea; even if I arm myself with the nuts. On the other hand, if I pose as utterly helpless, they might delay the attack. I did not pick up any of the nuts, but kept three of them within easy reach, at my feet, should the need arise.

I stood, about three feet from Dikshit, partly covering him from the approaching men. They came walking fast, no more shouting, and halted about fifteen feet from us. Three of them stood in a row, and the oldest of them, unarmed, probably their leader, stood a step or two ahead of the rest. In the typical manner as a Red Indian on the screen greets the enemy, the leader raised his right hand, bent at the elbow and said, "Hai." I reciprocated similarly, wondering what was going to happen next. The whole lot of them approached within six or seven feet, the three stood like statues, expressionless. The leader walked forward, looked at my blood-stained legs and went straight to Dikshit, peered hard at his face, checked his epaulets and said "Capiton." This was the first word he had uttered, which I could understand. Otherwise he sent out a volley of unintelligible words. Since the fellow could recognize a captain from his in-

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signia, my suspicion grew stronger. But as there was no sign of an attack yet, probably they had orders to catch us alive. As the three men came closer, Dikshit asked me to help him sit up. As I was helping him, one of the three persons came forward to help, threw the dull, rusty blade on the sand. What a relief! Now only one was left armed. I kept my eyes on him all the time. Dikshit asked for a cigarette. With gestures I tried to explain and it worked. One of them pulled out a cigarette and lighted it. Dikshit supported his body with his left arm and couldn't hold the cigarette. At Dikshit's request one of them placed the cigarette in his hand and helped him to smoke it. Puff after puff he drew and said that this was the most enjoyable cigarette he ever had, in his whole life.

I tried to look at the make of the cigarette and the matches. 'Shanghai,' was one word I got. I made various gestures to explain to them we were from an airplane crash. I drew an airplane in the sand. I didn't know whether they understood or not, so expressionless were they. But I was sure they must have seen the crash if they had been on the island the previous night. While Dikshit was puffing away at his cigarette, I pointed to the coconuts and requesting them to pull a few down, made gestures explaining that we were thirsty. I had expected that one of them would climb up a tree. Nothing of that kind happened. The Chief shouted out a blabber of words, and one of them instantly vanished. Then I made one of them light a fire and we both dried Dikshit's and my shirts on it. Our underwears had already dried by body heat.

As we were putting on our dried shirts, a new man appeared, who carried a long bamboo in his hand. Fear of their killing us had now vanished from me. I kept wondering, however, how Dikshit was so cool and took

their friendliness for granted. The man with the bamboo pulled down a number of coconuts, sliced their tops with the long knife, which was lying in the sand, and gave one to each one of us. We gulped its sweet water, the sweetest we ever had, and requested for more. Life sprang back into us. Dikshit stood up. We then requested them for the tender kernel of the coconuts. Hurriedly, greedily, we devoured it. They all kept gaping at us with a mixture of curiosity and pity.

Immediately then the vanished man returned, almost running. He carried a thermos-flask in one hand and a small aluminium tiffin carrier in the other. He pulled out a glass tumbler from under his arm, handed it to Dikshit and filled it with warm brown tea, and poured a cupful in the bakelite flask cover for me. It contained no milk, nor any lime. But its tender flavour with sweet taste made us feel that, that was the best tea in the world—the best tea we ever had. As the warm fluid went down our throats, it brought back to us much of the vigour and strength we had spent in the fatal waters. Then they offered us freshly cooked sago pancakes and sugar. What a delicious meal it was ! It transformed the lonely island into a cool, luxurious refuge and the apparent ‘Killers’ into ‘Angels.’ Our intimacy increased and we entered into conversation through gestures as best as we could. On the sand I drew a house and asked where they lived on the island. I also drew a fish to ask them if they lived there for fishing. They pointed in the direction of the island from where they had emerged. They then urged us to walk with them in that direction. My tie was still on the life-jacket. I tied it as a sling around Dikshit’s neck to support his injured right arm. We then picked up our jackets and followed our saviours. When we had walked about thirty yards, their Chief pointed out a Dakota in the sky. It was eight o’clock in the morning.

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It must be a search plane, hovering over the crash-spot. It flew there for a while and then vanished.

We kept walking, I presumed, towards the huts of those humble men. Dikshit, with three of them, was twenty yards ahead of the rest. I couldn't keep pace and had to trot behind. Two of the younger ones, hardly sixteen years of age, kept me company. They obviously knew a few English words, for one of them said, pointing to each one of us in turn, "Friends." They had indeed been friends to us—and such nice friends.

At the north corner, the island had a small hillock which enhanced its beauty. Being in the midst of the sea, there wasn't any dirt on the light green shrubs which covered the entire island. Perhaps the rain of last night had washed the shrubs fresh. The island had the look of a mermaid sunbathing. Three small boats, two white and one blue, were anchored down here. We were back to civilisation. Tea, sago pancakes, cigarettes, boats! What more could we ask for? From here we crossed about twenty yards into the heart of the island and lodged in a solitary hut. Now I got a complete picture of the island. Ten men and women and half a dozen children lived on this tiny island. Men caught fish. The women cooked meals, as well as dried the fish. We were greeted by every occupant of the hut. Outside, fish were hung up for drying. These people earned their living by catching fish and collecting coconuts which they traded for their necessities of life. The Chief was not seen when we reached the hut. We were all served with some more of the deliciously flavoured tea, sago pancakes and sugar. One of the youngsters took some medicine from a bottle and started applying it to Dikshit's wounds. Later he handed it over to me. Myriads of flies hummed around the hut. I had to keep waving my arms to keep the flies

away from my wounds.

From the household-utilities like watches, cigarettes, etc. I knew that there must be a bigger island fairly close by from where these people bought or bartered these things. I tried for some time to know from them the whereabouts of such an island and to take us there. All my attempts failed miserably. My body had become red all over and I felt my temperature on the increase. I hoped that it wouldn't turn into pneumonia. Whilst I was thus musing over these thoughts, their Chief came running and said, "Boat, Doctor, Hospital." These words were enough to convince us that a boat had been arranged to take us to some hospital. He urged us to hurry. I knew that it must be a long journey. After my query, he pointed to his watch to indicate that the journey would take us five to seven hours. A short walk to the other side of the island brought us to a small boat. In it was laid a knitted cane-mat, and on one side a basket from which jutted out bottles. Near the basket lay a broad brimmed wooden hat. The mat was specially laid for Dikshit, who could lie down comfortably on it. I sat at the boat's rear end. Behind us sat the Chief. The front end was occupied by a youngster, probably a son of the Chief. When we took our position in the boat, the Chief put on the wooden hat, put the oars on his lap and said a prayer. The journey might well be a hazardous one, I thought, and should everything not go well, I must cling to the life-jacket. All the inhabitants of the island and their women and children assembled on the bank to bid us *bon voyage*. Their innocent, plain looks spoke more than words could have expressed. These simple folks living a secluded life on a far away island really had hearts of gold. They rescued us from dreary sands, offered us meals and were rushing us to a place where medical aid could be sought. Their friendly farewell considerably moved me.

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After a brief and strange prayer the Chief and his son started working their oars. The boat was rapidly cutting through the water. Along side of us, in two canoes, two other men from the island were rapidly plying the water. I was wondering if this was part of a farewell ceremony. They soon overtook us and headed towards the adjoining island. We followed them. I was wondering if the hospital was on this island we were heading for. I tried to ask the Chief. He uttered something and made gestures unintelligible to me. As we approached this adjoining island, to my joy and surprise I saw Pathak emerging from the trees. He was met by the men in the canoe. He was not aware of our boat. I waved my hand and blew a whistle to draw his attention. He heard the whistle and waved back and was walking along the beach, away from us, with the two men from the canoes. I gave Dikshit a complete running commentary of Pathak and his movements. He was wearing only shorts. Didn't have even his shirt. We both were astonished that he was unable to reach the Great Natuna, and was almost on the same island. In fact Dikshit and myself had made an unsuccessful attempt for this very island. It was the storm that had pushed him out, too. When we approached the island's shore quite close, I saw a solitary orange floating on the water. I gave a cry of surprise, "Dikshit, there are oranges on this island." Pathak then stepped in to our boat, his left arm in a sling. He suggested that we should pay these boat-men. Dikshit and I had left our money with our trousers. Pathak, very optimistically, had transferred his wallet to his shirt-pocket before discarding his trouser. He had on him thirty or forty rupees. We all came to a quick decision and gave away the entire amount to the Chief. He accepted with great protestations.

We were happy to be together again. We proceeded

with our journey, and the two men returned in the canoes to their parent island. The Chief pulled out from his basket a rough woollen material to cover our legs, so the flies wouldn't disturb us. He gave his wooden hat to me and put on his velvet cap. He offered tea to Pathak. He drank a little and gave us a brief resume of his landing. The storm had pushed him close to this island. Since we three were in close proximity before the storm, he felt certain that, we too must be on the same island. In the darkness he started searching for us. He moved around shouting, "Dikshit," "Karnik." Being completely exhausted and certain of finding us on the same island, a distant coconut tree stub in the darkness looked like a human figure to him. He rushed to it; touched it, and was disappointed. He was soon disillusioned, and went into a slumber of exhaustion at the foot of a tree. When he woke up it was at an early hour of dawn. He started surveying the small island. It was so small that within an hour he walked its entire periphery. Not a soul, except himself, occupied the island. He then attended to his fractured arm. Broke a branch of a stubby little shrub, broke it into small bits, about four inches long; placed two bits one on either side of his left fore-arm, tore his shirt and bandaged the bits firmly. Then with the remaining part of the shirt he contrived a sling. When thirst and hunger began to trouble him he began a frantic search. Coconuts were out of reach. With a broken arm he could not possibly climb a tree. In his frantic search he came across a small, short, 'Papaya' tree. Hopefully he pulled out one and after a single bite had to discard it. It was awfully bitter. He had to remain without a drink or a bite. Suddenly his attention was drawn by candle lights on the adjoining island. He knew that some fishermen must be living on it. He drew the fishermen's attention by blowing the whistle he had with him. Someone who had heard the whistle appeared on the

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opposite bank and vanished. After sometime he intended repeating his call. But soon he saw the two canoes and heard me blowing a whistle. I said to Pathak, “Did you see any oranges on the island ? I saw one floating near your island.”

He chuckled and replied, “It wasn’t from the island. When it was decided to ditch, I had pocketed one from the aircraft. I thought it might be useful.” I asked him, “Why did you throw it away?” He said, “It was soaked in the sea.”

I could not but admire him for his sheer optimism, to slip an orange in the pocket when almost everyone was resolved to meet the worst.

On with the journey. Cloudless blue sky above and the clear, greenish-blue water and a number of islands, around were emeralds of the tropics. The temperature was moderate, fairly cool in the shade. But the direct rays of sun were so warm that in an hour’s time the skin of our exposed bodies got burnt and started peeling off. After about an hour we came to the spot where we had struggled for over four hours last night. We could now get a clear idea of the powerful water currents. With five men in the boat, when the oars were stopped even for a moment, the boat got drifted sideways, clean off the course. We were wondering how far we had still to go and where. To our gestured queries the Chief would point in the direction of the south and merely say “Natuna.” We knew that all these islands were called the ‘Natuna Group of Islands’ and that we were heading for one of them, probably more densely populated, than the others.

My father’s diary further contained :

Poona, 12th April 1955—In the morning all had got

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up tired after a restless night. When the morning paper came everyone almost jumped at it. The headlines repeated the last night's radio broadcast news, and the text of the news contained the names of the crew—

Commander Capt. D. K. Jatar  
1st Officer Capt. M. C. Dikshit  
Flight Navigator J. C. Pathak  
Flight Engineer K. D'Cunha  
Flight Pursers C. D'Souza and J. Pimenta  
Air Hostess Miss Gloria Berry  
Maintenance Engineer A. S. Karnik.

Gloom fell over the entire house. My wife burst into sobs and others could not hold back their tears.

“Poor Kamal” (my *fiancée*) someone said.

My second son, Manohar, a Merchant Navy Pilot just then arrived from Bombay to comfort us. He said that the airplane was ditched on the sea. And the sea is his friend. It would never let him down! The sea must save Anant, he had said. We all were greatly comforted by this assurance.

On the day of *Kashmir Princess's* departure from Bombay, my prospective mother-in-law, Mrs. Sule and her eldest daughter, had seen me at the airport for finalizing of my marriage date—19th of May.

The very next day—12th April 1955—both of them set about the work of booking the hall for the ceremony and reception for marriage etc. They went down to the residence of Prof. Mohile near Dadar railway station,

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to book Poddar College hall. The professor was greatly surprised to see the two ladies apparently gay and happy. He had been very uneasy since the morning news was read by him. These ladies, he thought, either had some good news or they were not aware of the tragedy that had overtaken the *Kashmir Princess* and its occupants.

Without any preliminaries, Mrs. Sule offered the cash deposit for the hall rent to Prof. Mohile. The bunch of notes were lying near the morning paper. The paper, however, was lying with its headlines at its bottom face mercifully enough for Mrs. Sule at the moment.

The Professor would not take the money and told Mrs. Sule to come some other time and that he was unable to accept the money at this stage. Mrs. Sule thought his behaviour rather peculiar. Mrs. Mohile very tactfully took the daughter to another room and explained the situation. The daughter too had not seen the newspaper that morning. She pretended a somewhat composed look, came into the hall and told her mother that she was suddenly taken ill and must get home immediately. She did not divulge anything to her mother till they had reached home.

We had left Batu Bilis island at about 9 a.m. Now we were near the south end of the Great Natuna. The time was 11-30 a.m. The Chief knew that we must be hungry, and pulled out from the basket some cooked rice and fish. All five of us shared the entire contents. We were really hungry. Not a bit was spared. And how tasty was the fish ! Dikshit even said that some day he would return to these islands for a short holiday and learn how to prepare tea and cook the fish. Pathak and I, enthusiastic, and happy after the ravishingly tasty meal, assured him that we too would join him on the holiday.

In the distance, towards the north, the Batu Bilis was diminishing in size. Island Salor with its big hill, which previous night was our most important landmark, we had just passed on our right. A steam-boat was seen rushing towards it and away from it and then again back to the island. It must be a fishing vessel. The Chief tried to draw her attention by waving a piece of cloth and by shouting, but in vain. The steam-boat continued its routine, unheeding and undisturbed.

As we watched exasperated the steam-boat routine on the western horizon appeared a silvery dot. It grew larger and then one more appeared behind the first one. They ought to be some airplanes. Soon their shape was discernible. They were R.A.F. Sunderland flying boats, either from Singapore or Hong Kong. They must be on a search mission. Two of us still unaccounted for, we hoped that the flying boats might be able to trace them. Since we three could reach an island, there was every reason to believe that the other two must be on some island, too. The two flying boats hovered over the scene of the crash and right above us, only about three to four hundred feet high. We could clearly see the 'observer' in a window near the tail end of the aircraft. We pointed to the 'observer' in the aircraft in the direction of the island we presumed the two persons could be on. Pathak said that since these were rescue planes one of them should alight on the water and pick us up. We waved our life-jackets to the airplanes, a recognised signal to indicate that we were the survivors. One more Sunderland flying boat joined in the search around all the islands. Pathak said, "Just lucky that none of us is badly injured. What's the use of their wasting petrol here? They might as well take us to Singapore," and added with fury, "They will probably pick up only when we are in the water. I feel like jumping in the water if only to be fished out." After about half an

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hour of hovering above us, all the three aircrafts departed.

The Chief was not a person to despair. He and his son continued rowing the boat doggedly in spite of the scorching sun. We went on chatting, disturbed every now and then by flies which had followed us from Batu Bilis. I tried to cover my leg wounds as best as I could. But a fly somehow sneaked in, compelling me to interrupt the conversation to drive it away. The skin from the exposed wounds was burnt red and a thin layer from their top started peeling off. Far ahead out of the south horizon appeared an island with tiled roof buildings. A smile shone on the Chief's face. He pointed to it and said, "Sidhanav, Doctor, Hospital." We guessed that "Sidhanav" must be the name of the town where we would find our doctor.

Distances look deceptive over water. 'Sidhanav' seemed to be so close ; but constant rowing towards it wouldn't seem to diminish the distance between us. We kept looking towards 'Sidhanav' hopefully, and not without curiosity. Whilst we were thus plodding the weary way a 'Dakota' flew low over us. Pathak, already wild with the futile flying of the Sunderlands, said, "The Sunderlands must have told the Dakota, 'Well, we have been enjoying flying. Now it is your turn to enjoy.' " The Dakota made one more round in our vicinity and vanished.

As we were nearing 'Sidhanav' we saw a small ship anchored close to the shore. I was thrilled with joy. "I wish, the ship could take us to Singapore." I pulled out the whistle from a life-jacket and started blowing an SOS on it. A little later, my excitement was cooled down somewhat, I realized that we were still very far from the ship and it was not likely that my whistle would

be heard there. I stopped blowing the whistle. The ship was not leaving in a hurry. We could probably contact its Captain after we get ashore. I was so engrossed in the ship that I was hardly aware that we were already very close to the small pier of 'Sidhanav.' It was most amazing that the pier and about a hundred yards of embankment was crowded with men, women and children—a few hundreds. It was, obviously, a big town and the entire population seemed to be out in the burning hot sun, gazing at our small boat. I kept wondering how they could know that we were coming. Perhaps, when I was busy blowing the SOS signal on my whistle someone must have seen our boat, known from our appearance who we were. And on a small island, it takes only seconds for its entire population to gather together.

After five gruelling hours of ceaseless work on the part of the Chief and his son, the boat at last came to a standstill. A dozen friendly hands stretched out from the gathered spectators and helped us out of the boat on to the shore. Only ten yards away was a grocer's shop, where we were led. Three chairs were brought for us, every one around striving to comfort us, and children trying to sneak in through the crowds to peep at the marooned. There we sat, Pathak in a white short underwear and the torn remainder of his shirt bundled in his hand, Dikshit obviously tired, no more with his usual gay smile, dressed in a very short underwear and a shirt. I sat next to him in a similar attire. A stout, burly person, in khaki shorts and white, half-sleeve shirt, came forward, greeted us with a broad smile and kindly enquired of us. He told us that he was from the ship that was anchored outside and that the ship was leaving shortly. With self-pity and anxiety in our tone, we told him who we were and requested him to inform the Captain of the ship that we must talk to him urgently. He assured us that he would. He went out and soon

we saw him step in a boat fitted with an outboard motor, and rushed off to the ship. In the shop we were offered cold drinks and spoken to in broken English. A school teacher appeared a little later. He could speak English quite well. Then a policeman came and took down our names, designations and other statements. The school teacher acted as an interpreter. The policeman asked us if we had any identity on us. Pathak still had, tucked on his shirt the embroidered ‘wing’ with the ‘AIR-INDIA’ emblem. The policeman made a few notes, told us that the Municipal Commissioner would interview us next and vanished.

When the policeman had gone, a silent spell fell in the room. This gave me an opportunity to study the surroundings better. I shouted to Dikshit excitedly when I saw a big photograph of Dr. Sokarno on the wall, “Look there, Dr. Sokarno’s photograph.”

Dikshit said, “So this is all Indonesian territory.” I sighed with relief. Friendly waters ! Now I knew why Dikshit had been so calm in the morning on Batu Bilis at the approach of the four men. How I regretted I didn’t know that the islands belonged to Indonesia ! How much agony such a fore-knowledge would have spared me.

We sat there for more than one hour amongst curious spectators. Then we were told that we should move to the ‘Rest House’ a hundred yards away. Pathak and Dikshit went out first and I followed them limping. Two youngsters rushed forward to me and offered support of their shoulders which I readily accepted. We were all bare-footed. The uneven wooden planks of the pier and the rough stones of road had become very hot and hurt our feet. Along the path, houses were lined up on both sides and every door and window had faces jutting

out to take a peep at us. Seeing my limping agony, some people rushed out of a house with a chair, asked me to sit on it and said that they would carry me right up to the 'Rest House.' I refused to burden them and said that I would walk as long as there was even the slightest strength in my legs. They smiled appreciatively and let me proceed on my own.

At the end of this walk we crossed a very narrow channel of water by means of a flimsy-looking narrow bridge and came to a tiny pucca house. This was the 'Rest House'—cool, airy and comfortable. Three camp-cots were laid out for us, each one covered with clean white linen and a pillow at one end.

We all three stretched out, one on each cot. How luxurious was it to relax thus, in a sheltered place. What a contrast was it with our last night's 'bed'. I could hardly believe that only a night before we were having a life and death struggle. Soon the 'Doctor' arrived. A qualified compounder was the only person on this island available for any medical treatment. With the help of an assistant, he set about cleaning and dressing up our wounds, small as they were but all over our hands and legs, and a few more on other parts of our bodies. The Rest House was crowded with curiosity-filled observers. Though a large number of them had gathered, the discipline maintained by them was exemplary. There was no noise, no chatter among them. No one tried to rush in the house. They were content to peep in from a distance. Only a few volunteers were allowed in who constantly fed us fruit and supplied iced-water for drinking.

We were relaxing, trying to get some sleep. We three had closed our eyes when the thought of the cut on my head occurred to me. It was not hurting me.

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I merely wanted to know how bad it was. I asked our ‘Doctor’ to have a look at it. Without a word he pulled out a pair of scissors, nearly sat on my back and started cutting hair around the wound, then he told his assistant to get equipment ready for stitching the wound. I was bewildered at the thought of getting a wound stitched on the far away island and that too by one who was not a qualified doctor. I consulted Dikshit and said that I must rather get it attended to in Singapore, but I was advised to get it done immediately. The ‘Doctor’ realizing my hesitation, assured me that he could do the job as well as it could be done anywhere else. I consented to it. Firstly I was given a shot of penicillin. Then the wound was cleaned, locally anaesthetized and stitched. The cleaning process hurt me very badly and I shouted in pain. When the entire stitching was done I looked a little cheerful again. I thanked the ‘Doctor’ for a quick, almost painless and efficient job, and apologized to Pathak and Dikshit for disturbing their sleep by my shouts. The ‘Doctor’ performed his work with great skill and dexterity ; and when he had finished the last stitch with a confident smile, he asked me sarcastically, “Well, would you rather have had it done in Singapore ?”

I said, “I am very comfortable now. You are a good doctor,” and I thanked him and his assistant profusely.

Every one from the doorway moved out and even the whispering around us was silenced. Three gentlemen in white trousers and white shirts entered. Chairs were immediately placed in front of us where they were seated. A smiling, pleasant and amiable lot they looked. One of them introduced himself to us as the Municipal Commissioner. He then introduced the other two of his colleagues. They expressed their great regret for the disaster and sympathised with us for the suffering we had undergone and hoped that we were comfortable on their small island.

We thanked them for their visit and for the comforts provided for us. We requested them to convey our gratitude to the people of the island, for their overwhelming hospitality. Then they left.

Fifteen minutes after the Municipal officers had left the room, a stout, handsome Englishman walked in. He introduced himself as the Chief Officer of the ship *Taype* anchored outside. He came to meet us under orders from the Captain. He took down our names and designations and said that he would, in the first place, arrange to telegraph the names to Singapore. He asked us about the possibility of more survivors. All this information, he said, he would send immediately. Then he told us that though the ship was ready to leave for Singapore, they would detain it till we were ready to board. Being a cargo ship it took them six days to reach Singapore. So they would leave us at a place on their way, in the care of an expert German doctor so that medical treatment would be available to us as soon as possible. They would then pick us up for Singapore on their next trip. We thanked him in anticipation for all the troubles and requested him for some clothes from his ship's stores and told him that all payments would be made in Singapore.

Soon, the gentleman through whom we had sent for the ship's Captain arrived with clothes packed under both his arms—underwears, shirts and shorts. Being clothes for the ship's crew, they were far too oversize for us. Yet we were glad to be dressed again in clean clothes. The ship was already delayed for our sake for more than two hours. We hurriedly paraded out of the Rest House where we had about three hours of comfort and luxury besides medical aid. The islanders were lined up on both sides of our path. We reciprocated smilingly to their expression of farewell. We paused for a brief

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moment at the pier, shook hands with the compounders and the fishermen, thanked them for the trouble they took and bade farewell to all the people that had gathered around. We all felt sorry to leave them after such a small stay there. They were such hospitable and kindly folk, we would have loved to stay with them, much longer.

## Yet Another Sunset !

THE SMALL boat with an outboard motor took us to *Taype*. The Chief Officer welcomed us aboard. The two compounders had accompanied us to the ship. We once again thanked them for their kindness and then they departed. The Chief Officer of *Taype* introduced us to the ship's Captain, an amiable middle-aged person who was peering over a chart, with a pair of dividers in his hands. The Captain laid down the pair of dividers over the chart, stepped forward and gave a warm hand-shake to each one of us in turn, and said, "I am glad to meet you, gentlemen, though I wish we should have met in happier circumstances." Then he asked us the duration we had spent in the water. "About nine hours" we said. He was greatly amazed and said, "Didn't you come across any sharks? These waters are densely infested with sharks. It's hard to imagine how you were spared. Make yourself at home." And he once again got busy with his charts. The *Taype* was all set to start, with steam fuming in its boilers. Soon her propeller was churning the water and she was cutting through the sea, leaving the beautiful 'Sidhanav' behind her.

It was 5 o'clock. The sun was burning brightly. Tiny little islands were passing by and *Taype* majestically steamed out on its way through difficult waters.

*Taype* was a small ship. It had a limited accommodation. This was to our advantage. Being injured, we could cover only a short distance with ease. Limping, I

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kept moving from the 'Bridge' to the dining room, a distance of barely fifteen yards. The dining room had a modest appearance. A wooden table fixed to the deck floor with four surrounding chairs. We stayed there most of the short journey on *Taype*. From here we could comfortably see the evening glory rushing steadily to the West. We had tea with biscuits, butter and jam. Hardly two days had elapsed since we had such real tea. Then we had taken amenities for granted. But now I felt that we were tasting such food after being marooned on a desert island for ages. We finished our tea and proceeded to the deck.

We stretched ourselves in relaxation. The *Taype* penetrated the deep-blue waters casting ripples crowned with snow-white foam. The deep-blue of the sea contrasted delicacy of the white foam, but, before one could fully appreciate its elegance mounting on the ripples it floated away, again, to merge with the parent sea. 'Sidhanav' was long since left beyond the southern horizon. Small emerald islands had followed the same trail. Gray and brown rocks emerged out of the deep-blue sea. They had a sinister charm that demanded all your attention. Their haunting magnificence thrilled the three of us and we kept peering at them. They clearly indicated that this was a treacherous sea to navigate. As I was thinking of this, and talking to Pathak and Dikshit, the Captain came down from the 'Bridge' and joined in our conversation. He pointed out the huge rocks and told us that the German warship 'Emden' used to take refuge amongst the very rocks during the First World War and attack enemy ships unawares. He said that the warship had played havoc in the Far East in those days. We could imagine the stray, unexpected attacks on unarmed merchant vessels; their helpless sinking. Men who manned the ships—most of them trapped and sunk—others, those who emerged to the surface must have struggled against the powerful water currents only to be devoured by merciless sharks.

Sharks, deadly sharks, I couldn't imagine where the whole lot of them had gone yesterday afternoon and night. Only twenty-four hours earlier the three of us that now were in absolute safety and comfort were struggling for life against an uncertainty of survival.

Dikshit desired a smoke and, in an instant, the Chief Officer and the purser brought forth three tins of fifty and two packets—each of ten cigarettes. Dikshit said that he wanted just one cigarette. But the ship's overwhelming hospitality compelled him to accept the whole load of tobacco offered to him.

*Taype* by now had barely travelled for an hour and a half. I was thinking of the German doctor in whose care we would be on the island where we would reach after two days. I have always liked to stay in small towns and quiet surroundings. A tiny island scarcely inhabited, simple folk with modest wants, would be a paradise of a place. Recuperation would be speedier amidst a congenial atmosphere and modern amenities unspoiled by commercialized civilization. Not for long could I cherish this day-dream. The Captain once again emerged from behind us and smilingly told us, "Well, after all you will not be reaching Singapore that late. A British frigate is coming soon to pick you up. If it sails out tonight you will be in Singapore tomorrow afternoon." I am not sure whether I felt happy at the news or not. This is because I had cherished in my mind a cozy voyage on *Taype*. The friendliness of its crew was overwhelming. We all should have jumped up with joy at the news of the British frigate. It meant going home sooner. I couldn't imagine at once what was behind this hesitant acceptance of joy to be back home soon. On a little introspection I could clearly see the picture of official enquiry and scores of acquaintances pestering us with their curiosity. I will

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always remember the words of the Government of India Official when he interrogated us at Singapore, "I know that you have gone through a hard time, but the real hard time for you is to start now." And meeting those attacks of friendliness and sympathy along with bombardment of questions about the crash from all the acquaintances was harder on the nerves than the fire and smoke in the airplane, its crashing on the water and the helpless struggle for hours through the deep sea and darkness.

In half an hour we passed a small vessel, not modern looking. The Captain told us that was an Indonesian salvage ship proceeding to the scene of the crash. And in another half an hour we saw on the horizon the clear outlines of a British naval ship, immaculately white, speeding towards us. Its details grew as the ship came nearer. Elegant, long and slender, with a streamlined and slanting funnel puffing out no smoke at all. With curiosity I was gazing at what was to be our new home. *Dampier* majestically steamed along *Taype* which was now brought to a standstill. *Dampier* went past us, turned 180 degrees and came alongside *Taype* and stopped. Its entire deck was lined with bare-bodied men wearing only white shorts and shoes. The Captain of the *Taype* came to us, smiling as he ever was, looked at the assemblage on the *Dampier* and said, "There seems to be a mighty welcome for you boys. He also informed us that he had requested *Dampier's* medical officer to come aboard *Taype* and examine Pathak and Dikshit's broken bones before transferring us on the other ship.

As we were engaged in conversation with the Captain, we saw a huge life-boat speed up from *Dampier* towards *Taype*. It had no less than ten men. It came alongside and only two officers came aboard. One of them was very young looking, almost boyish, but with a stern gait,

acquired through naval discipline. The other one, in his early thirties, wore a beard, had a dominating yet pleasant and captivating personality. The young officer greeted the Captain of *Taype*, first told him that he was there on behalf of his Captain to take us on the *Dampier* and that the doctor would check up on those that needed immediate attention. Accordingly Dr. Corney utilized the Captain's room for examination and examined Dikshit's and Pathak's broken bones. All of us were considered fit enough to go across in the life-boat. Without much ceremony we must depart. We didn't know how to repay the generosity of the Captain of the *Taype*. We all three went up to him to bid him goodbye and thanked him for his hospitality. Pathak returned to ask for the bill, which would be settled in Singapore. Jovial as the Captain was, he said, "Only fifty thousand pounds," and immediately added, "It's all free, on Her Majesty's account." We profusely thanked him and Her Majesty the Queen for the Royal comforts and privileges we had enjoyed on the little *Taype*. As we came down the gangway, we met the Chief Officer and Chief Engineer. We thanked them with heavy hearts. Since leaving the hospitable islanders of 'Sidhanav', for the second time that day we were parting from very close friends whom we may never meet again.

As we stepped on board the *Dampier* the Captain and the ship's Officer greeted us. I was left in the care of an officer and Pathak and Dikshit were led to the Hospital rooms. I turned around to see if *Taype* was still there. It was a busy ship. It wouldn't wait idly anywhere. I could see her diminutive stern in the distant. I kept watching her until she had vanished behind the horizon.

I sat down on the deck, talking to one of the officers who offered me a drink. I was only too happy at such an offer. We had had a hard day and I thought that a

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spot of drink would do me a lot of good. A large whisky and soda was immediately brought forth. I gulped rather fast. It was repeated once again. To my amazement the *Dampier* was following the same route by which *Taype* had brought us. The young, pleasant officer explained to me that we were not leaving for Singapore immediately. *Dampier* would be anchored in the neighbourhood of Natuna islands over-night and next day search for the other surviving members, two of whom we had definitely seen afloat. And only the next evening *Dampier* would set sail for Singapore.

The sun had set. Even the red from the sky was fading. Dr. Corney came up to me and asked me if I would like to go to bed. Yes, indeed, I must sleep. Instantly a bed was spread on the deck. Being in the tropics the cabins were very warm, and therefore most officers slept on the ship's deck covered by a tarpaulin. I was glad that I was treated more like an officer than a patient. Though both my legs hurt me, I could move about with fair ease, and this gave me all the extra privileges.

I got into the bed that was laid out for me. I felt that I had a slight temperature. I covered myself with a woollen rug. I could not sleep. But laying in the bed motionless was quite comfortable. Dr. Corney came up to ask me about supper. I desired only a cup of soup, toast and butter ; nevertheless, I needed sleep more than food. Then I told the 'Doctor' that I had slight temperature and that I thought there was a small fracture in the right toe. He said, "We will check on the fracture tomorrow. About temperature, I wouldn't be surprised if you have a high one. And whisky makes it worse." Good Lord ; I had taken the whisky with quite the contrary idea. Obviously the 'Doctor' had seen me drinking it, and probably knew that it was no good for me. Yet

he was indulgent enough not to stop me.

The last of the twilight hung on the Western horizon. *Dampier* was anchored half a mile from the scene of the crash. Not far was visible the island Salor. The Great Natuna was in the distant. Twenty-four hours ago we had seen a similar twilight fading and with it our hopes to live too. Then, on the Western horizon the remnant of the floating oil was still burning. All three of us were within hearing distances of one another. Two more souls lay at a distance, helplessly floating. No one knew if we could be alive the next morning. Nor had we much hope. Out of those rare hopes we had come out alive and now we lay in safety and comfort. What fate the other two met with, I could not imagine. Perhaps they were on some island, exposed to wind and cold or worse. I prayed that they should be alive. Apart from the five of us, the rest of them had not seen the sun's rays after being submerged under water.

Whilst thus thinking I must have passed into a quiet slumber. I felt some one wake me up. Very reluctantly I opened my eyes, rolled to the left and saw a person squatting on the deck, by my bed. It was almost dark on the deck, except for a few pencils of light sneaking from the ward-room. The person by my bed-side couldn't, in the dim light around, have seen the expression of annoyance on my face. Before I could say anything, he said, "Can I give you an injection? It will put you to sleep." I readily consented. Sleep was all I needed; it was the only thing I desired above all. Anything to induce me to sleep was welcomed. The person was Dr. Corney's assistant. He vanished immediately after he gave me the injection.

Soup and toast was brought to me. Barely had I finished it, when Dr. Corney's assistant returned. "Do

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you want to send any message home?" he asked. I knew that it was possible to send a message from the ship. But this was the privilege of the V.I.P.s. I was quite astonished at the offer. I could hardly believe what he said. I thought that he must have made a mistake. He must have meant to send a message to Air-India International. I repeatedly asked him whether he meant what he said. Only after his assurance I wrote down a message for my mother. I knew that she must have been worried. A personal telegram from me would bring her immense joy. I also thought that, I must send one more message to my *fiancée*. I ventured to ask, "Can I send one more message?"—"Surely," was the reply. I scribbled on a pad both the messages with addresses. Now I felt as if some heavy burden was off my chest. I could feel that something was bothering my ease; something was pricking my conscience. But I couldn't know what it was. It was only after I had scribbled the two messages that I knew what the worry was. It was the worry that my mother and *fiancée*, besides other relatives, must have been deeply worried about me. Now my mind was at peace; though not quite altogether. My message read, "Perfectly all right will write soon." I was hardly injured, but I knew that it would be hard to convince them, in spite of my message, that a person can come out safe from such a disastrous air-crash. My relatives knew very well that normally I would understate my injuries and in the first instance would not accept my message at its face value, however true it actually was.

The mind being thus unburdened I slept for most of the night, though not quite undisturbed.

Rewa, the former capital of Vindhya Pradesh is a small town. My *fiancée* Kamal was staying in this town in her father's small bungalow. There was no radio in the house. Prominent newspaper in the town is *Amrit Bazar Patrika*

published at Calcutta. It therefore brings news to Rewa twenty-four hours late. Since Kamal had no radio nor the latest news the first telegram she received from my brother reading : "ANANT SAFE DO NOT WORRY" Bombay 12.4.55 threw her into confusion. She did not know what it meant. She wanted to know the full details. She wrote an express delivery letter and addressed it to me.

The next day *Amrit Bazar Patrika* brought the news of the Indian Airliner's crash on the flight from Hong Kong to Jakarta. Now she knew the full implications of the telegram she had earlier received. Later during the day she received the telegram sent by me from H.M.S. *Dampier* "PERFECTLY ALL RIGHT WILL WRITE SOON."

This late information about the crash had at least spared her the agonies.

Safe from an air-crash but how about the injuries? It is not possible for survivor of an air crash to escape unscathed, she thought. Now she started worrying and straight rushed to the post office and scribbled a telegram to Air-India International to be sent to me : "CONGRATULATIONS PROVIDENTIAL ESCAPE WIRE HEALTH."

## NEWS FLASH

SINGAPORE, *April 12, 1955*

THE BRITISH Royal Air Force said that there were three known survivors, all members of the crew of the Air-India Constellation, *Kashmir Princess*. The R.A.F. said that survivors were taken aboard the British naval frigate, H.M.S. *Dampier*, . . . the craft that sped to the scene 250 miles north-east of Singapore, . . .

*U.P.A. and the Times of India News Service.*

LONDON, *April 12, 1955*

China tonight charged the United States and Kuomintang China with "deliberately engineering" the plane crash yesterday in a plot to "murder" the Chinese Premier, Mr. ChouEn-Lai, and other Communist delegates to the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung.

The Peking broadcast, monitored here, said that before the departure of the ill-fated plane from Hong Kong, "the Government of the People's Republic of China had learnt that secret organizations of the U. S. A. and the Chiang Kai-Shek brigands were actively working to wreck the Indian plane chartered by the Chinese delegation, so as to carry out the plot to murder the members of the Chinese delegation headed by the Premier Mr. ChouEn-Lai, and to sabotage the Afro-Asian Conference."

The broadcast went on :

"At 9-30 a.m. on April 10, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs informed the Office of the British *Charge d'affaires* in Peking of this and requested him to draw the attention of the British authorities in Hong Kong to this matter so as to take measures to ensure the safety of the staff members of the Chinese delegation and correspondents.

"Officials of the Office of the British *Charge d'affaires* promised to notify the British authorities in Hong Kong."

*U.P.A. and Times of India News Service.*

HONG KONG, April 13, 1955

A Hong Kong Government spokesman confirmed that the British *Charge d'affaires* in Peking warned the authorities here of the Chinese Government's suspicions of a plot "to sabotage" the Air-India International Constellation. . . . As a result of the warning, he said, "we did take more than usual precautions."

—*Reuter.*

HONG KONG, April 13, 1955

An official Hong Kong Government Statement said today that the plane had been under close police guard between the time it arrived from India and the moment it took off for Bandung.

It said that it was extremely unlikely that anything could have been planted on the plane . . . .

*U.P.I.—A.F.P.*

## Three Coffins on the Deck

WHEN I woke up, the stars from the sky had vanished and the sea around us bright and shining. Though it was only about 6 o'clock, the sun was pretty high. Countless wave-crests glimmered in the brilliant sun-shine. The breeze kept the temperature down. Islands around, deeply clad with fresh green vegetation, had a dew-drop tenderness. They looked very pleasant. With all this brightness around, a pang of bitterness stabbed at my heart. I had slept in comfort, whilst the two others afloat must have spent a dreadful night in horrifying darkness and loneliness.

The calmness around was disturbed by activity at the end of the deck. A life-boat was being lowered. I limped up to the railings. Two life-boats had already left, speeding towards the Great Natuna island. Two others roared their engines, churned the deep blue water into snowy white foam, and hurried towards Salor island. Two more, lastly lowered, were being finally checked up before commencing a full day's search. Three of the six boats were to tow a small row-boat behind to reach very shallow waters around the islands. The young officer with whom I had whisky last evening came out from the ward-room. He was to command the last of the boats. Smilingly he came up to me and asked, "Did you sleep well?"

"Quite well, thank you," I said.

"We are starting a search for the other survivors," he said. Since I knew the exact spot of the crash, I thought

that I could guide the search party to some extent. I said to the Officer, "I know the likely spot the survivors could have drifted to. Can I go with you?"

He laughed a little and said, "We will be staying out for the whole day. You had better stay on the ship. I think that already you have had enough of it." I knew it would be futile pursuing him to allow me to go with him. So I pointed out the likely spots and wished him good luck. He jumped into the motor boat.

I was watching the hurrying motor boats, when Dr. Corney came and stood next to me. With a pleasant smile asked, "Slept well?"

"Quite well. Thank you, Doctor," I said.

"Ready for a wash?" he asked and told me to follow him to the bath. A safety razor, shaving cream and a bath soap were all laid out for me. "You can have a shave and wash," said the Doctor. But my eyes were focussed on the big, white bath tub. The sight just fascinated me. What a wonderful thing it would be if I were able to bathe in the tub, I thought to myself. What a pity my hands and legs were bandaged and I had to forego the luxury of the bath. Some may laugh at the idea of the bath, and might say, "Hadn't you had enough of ducking already?" But the fact is that even if I am pulled out half drowned, a bath tub would still hold an irresistible temptation for me. I was stunned when Dr. Corney said as if reading my thoughts. "If you feel like taking a bath, please yourself." He continued, "Don't worry about wetting bandages; we will get you new ones; only take care not to wet your head where the stitches are."

I took full advantage of the luxurious bath room and

### THREE COFFINS ON THE DECK

afterwards got attired in the same clothes *Taype* had given us. I put my hand to the door knob, wondering, "How shall I find my way to the dispensary? It should not be difficult; after all, it's got to be somewhere on the ship. I opened the door and beheld the imposing figure of Dr. Corney. He must have been waiting for a long time there. He didn't want me to wander about with my aching legs. He escorted me to the ship's hospital room. I was so glad to be there. Here I found Dikshit and Pathak occupying the two beds, one above the other. They looked very cheerful. Pathak's arm was already in plaster and was slinged up. Dikshit's right arm was in a sling, too. Dikshit was non-chalantly puffing away a cigarette. We exchanged greetings. I took my seat on the top of a big chest to get new dressings. While fixing up my bandages, Dr. Corney asked me what breakfast would I like to have. He gave breakfast orders to a 'boy' for all three of us. After all the dressing of the wounds was completed and I sat down on a stool next to Dikshit who was on the lower bunk. The Doctor tapped me on my shoulder and said, "You can come back here after your breakfast." I followed him to the dining room. It was empty when we entered it. It seemed that everyone else had finished breakfast. I took my seat and instantly, all the things I had mentioned to Corney in the dispensary were laid out on the table. This amazed me. As I sat down to devour the steaming hot porridge and fried eggs, the Doctor left the room. I was alone in the brightly sunlit ward-room, a young Chinese bearer attending on me.

As the last gulp of coffee ran down my throat Dr. Corney stepped into the ward-room. It was most amazing how the Doctor always showed up when I had finished my bath, and also just when I had finished my coffee. As though he had the faculty to see behind closed doors and in far away ward-rooms. He escorted me almost

every time to the bath room, to the ship's hospital, to the ward-room, and on to the deck to my bed. No matter what time I woke, I never failed to find him by the bed side, in his crisp white uniform, never tired, and in a cool and composed tone he would enquire, "Did you sleep well?" At first his omnipresence amazed me, sometimes it re-assured me and finally I took it for granted. It was a feeling an infant would get finding its mother ever present by its side. Without a word of exaggeration I can say that we received motherly care from Dr. Corney. He is a perfect picture of a doctor—loving, all attentive and yet stern when necessary.

From the ward-room we journeyed to the hospital: I was limping and the doctor was following me. As we were walking, the doctor said, "You need a stick. It will help you a lot."

Stick. Oh, no. I wouldn't like to use a stick. Not as long as I could help it. What does it matter if my feet hurt me and I limped a little. Only recently I had read the life-sketch of Douglas Bader. This man had not touched a stick even though both of his legs were amputated. It would be shame, I thought, if I, with slightly injured legs, should use a stick for support. I tried to convince Dr. Corney "Doc, I don't think I need a stick. Besides on a ship the gangways are so narrow that there is always a support close at hand." I dared not look behind to scrutinize what reaction it had on the Doctor. He said nothing, I knew that he was not convinced. Silence sometimes is more disconcerting than a refusal aloud.

I spent about two pleasant hours in the hospital cabin talking to Dikshit and Pathak, and then returned to the ward-room. Some of the officers were sitting around, relaxing, each with a magazine or a newspaper, chatting

### THREE COFFINS ON THE DECK

occasionally in low soft tones. They all welcomed me amidst their friendly chatter. Beer was ordered for me, too. Soon a Chinese bearer brought me a mugful of delicious cold beer. I think that half my cheerfulness and sprightliness I owed to those spirits! Beer and whisky were a balm to our pains. The other half I owe to the crew of *Dampier*. It was their cordiality, understanding and hospitality that made us completely at home. Both my feet hurt me a lot whenever I walked, but in spite of it, I enjoyed moving about because there was always a pleasant smile awaiting me from a crew member whether he was relaxing or busy with his duties.

I was seated next to Lt. Hughes, the ship's diving officer, sipping the cool beer, and we fell into conversation. The moment I knew that he was the diving officer I enquired of him, "Could you not possibly go down to the airplane? We could then know as to how many persons got away." The ship was to wait until the search for more survivors was completed. There was enough time available to go down to ascertain the fate of the remaining crew members and passengers. Lt. Hughes smiled and said, "We had thought of it earlier. We have been refused permission by the Indonesian Government to go down." These are Indonesian waters and the permission was essential to carry out under-water search of the crashed airplane. But another request had been made and lieutenant said that he was hopeful that this time the request may be conceded.

We soon forgot about the airplane and our talk drifted to stories of the sea, sea-men, and their ships.

Some one hopped in to the ward-room and said to Lt. Hughes, in a sort of semi-announcement, "Permission has been granted," and left the ward-room. In a flash,

Lt. Hughes vanished too. One by one they all left the ward-room. I knew that they must be getting the diving gear ready. It was 11 o'clock. Half the day was over. After sun-down when the search parties return, we should be leaving for Singapore. By the time they got started the actual dives, it would be one or two o'clock. Three to four hours was all the time at their disposal. It was no wonder everyone hurried away. I looked, all attentive, at the deck, hoping that Lt. Hughes might come back. I thought that I must have a word with him before he leaves the ship. My concern was that I must help their mission all I could. I knew that Lt. Hughes couldn't be conversant with the construction of a 'Constellation'. If I could tell him a few points it might help him immensely. Under water he would have but a brief interval of time. He couldn't go on experimenting how to open doors. Locating doors itself would be a difficult task; opening them next to impossible, unless one has fore-knowledge of it.

After about half an hour I grew impatient and limpingly walked to the deck. To my surprise and joy I found Commander Row, Captain of the ship, standing alone on the ship. Stoutly built but rather short with a stubby little beard, he looked a perfect picture of a Naval Commander. "Players Please" should rather have photographed him. Cool and collected, he stood on the deck surveying the abundant water ahead. I walked up to him and said, "Good morning, Captain. I would like to have a word with Lt. Hughes before he commences his dives. It would be of use to him." Commander Row smilingly said in a pleasant tone, "I will send for him, you may sit in the ward-room." Soon Lt. Hughes arrived with the Captain. On a sheet of paper I drew a few sketches to explain the location of doors and baggage compartments, and explained how to open these doors. Lt. Hughes and Commander Row left the ward-room

### THREE COFFINS ON THE DECK

hurriedly for the task ahead.

After lunch I was looking through the pages of some magazines and fell asleep in the chair. When I woke up I found Dr. Corney's towering figure gazing at me. He said in a stern manner, "You should have asked for a bed." I knew that my awkward sleeping posture in the chair must have caused him some annoyance. However I explained to the Doctor, "I didn't know when I fell asleep."

I had my afternoon tea in the ward-room and feeling refreshed, went to the hospital to chat with Dikshit and Pathak, still confined to bed. Pathak entertained himself most of the time with a pair of head-phones plugged into a ship's radio. Besides, he kept talking to Dikshit, giving him important news whenever it was announced on the radio. Both of them had a good stock of old British newspapers. We kept on talking till it was dark.

Lt. Hughes bustled into the hospital room. He looked very tired from the hard work he had just undergone. All the veins on his arms and forehead were taut, a sure sign of physical exertion. His eyes were slightly blood-shot from the strain of searching under water, blood shot from the strain of searching often through slimy and muddy waters. His stout physique looked stouter in shorts and the tee-shirt he now was wearing. Despite all weariness, he unmistakably showed signs of gratification on his face through achievement of the task entrusted to him.

Lt. Hughes described in brief the diving work since the afternoon. He said, "As we went down and touched some part of the airplane three bodies got dislodged from the wreckage. All the three had inflated life-jackets on.

We found a passport on one—it is D'Cunha. A gold ring with initials on another which shows that he is Pimenta. The third body we are not able to identify. We also found a book in the wreckage on which was written the name 'Chou-en Lai.' As I picked up the book in my hand, it just disintegrated. I could not hold it in my hands, so soft and soaked it was. The aircraft is broken in many parts." He then gave a rather elaborate description of the wreckage as far as they could trace in the available time. And finally added, "I wish that we have just one more day available. Then we could discover the situation in the cabin."

All the boats that had gone for search returned late in the evening. Their day-long search had been of no avail. No one was traced and the ship's crew didn't hope that there could be anyone alive any more. Most of the islands are inhabited, and anyone who had made for one of the islands, would have been picked up. They had circled around all the islands.

We feared that the two persons afloat must have succumbed to some horrible end. They were not even traced. But for sheer chance we three, too, would have had a similar end. Deadly fish, like the eight feet long sharks and equally big, sworded Barracudas rule the marine kingdom around and mercilessly devour intruders.

It was a Wednesday, a movie-seeing day for the *Dampier*. A 'cowboy' movie was to be shown. The Officer-in-charge of Movies asked me if I would like to see the show, which was scheduled at 9 p.m. after dinner. "I'd love to," I said. "Of course Dr. Corney's permission would have to be sought for," he said.

After dinner I was standing on the deck by the rail-

### THREE COFFINS ON THE DECK

ings. At the rear end of the deck a big black screen was hung up. It struck me as rather odd, but its significance didn't strike me then. I was chatting with the youngest officer of the ship. With his baby face he looked like a school boy. Nearly at the end of our conversation he asked me where I would like to sleep that night. I had slept on the deck the previous night and naturally I thought that I should continue to sleep there. Cabins are very warm in summer, especially when in the tropics. But last night the ship was at a standstill. No doubt, there would be some breeze tonight, on the deck due to the forward motion of the ship. I was feeling fine, and I wouldn't mind a little extra breeze ; so I said that I would continue to sleep on the deck. The officer then explained to me why he has asked me to choose a sleeping spot. He said, "The corpses are kept on the deck behind the screen. Will that disturb you?" I was already feeling sleepy and didn't care to give much thought. "I don't think that I will be disturbed. I think I will sleep here." I said.

Dr. Corney walked up to us. The officer with the baby-face explained to the Doctor that I wouldn't mind sleeping on the deck. The Doctor pulled me aside and in low whisper said to me, "A cabin has been prepared for you downstairs. The bodies here might disturb you. However, the choice is yours." Now I began to think hard. I knew that it would be impossible to go to sleep on the deck. About thirty hours ago we all were talking to each other in a gay atmosphere. It was mere chance that I was here choosing a spot to sleep while *they* were there in naval coffins. But for the grace of God I might have been in one of those coffins. I wouldn't have been able to sleep but I might dream all sorts of dreadful dreams. I meekly said to Dr. Corney that I would sleep in the cabin.

To go down we had to cross the ward-room. I followed the Doctor, who was intercepted by the officer-in-charge of the movies who requested the Doctor that I might be permitted to attend the movie. Unhesitatingly the Doctor replied, "I recommend rest." A mere recommendation by Dr. Corney was like a verdict. There were no further requests. From the silence-filled room we marched off to the cabin which was to be my refuge for the night.

I was shown the cabin. My tooth-brush and tooth-paste were already there. Before departing, the Doctor said, "I will come back again to see if you are asleep. And there is no need for you to wake up early." I knew that he disapproved of my getting up early in the morning. I bade him "Good night" and went to bed.

After a somewhat disturbed sleep I woke up quite early the next morning. I couldn't sleep any longer. I dared not go up for the fear that it might offend Dr. Corney. So I sat in a chair wondering what I should do next. Soon I heard the familiar voice of Dr. Corney, "Good morning. Slept well?" His towering figure stood right in front of me. I was taken by surprise. Though by now I had accepted the omnipresence of Dr. Corney, so early in the morning I had not expected him to be down, for last night he had clearly told me not to wake up early. Now I realized what pains Dr. Corney must have been taking. Anytime I woke I found him there. He surely must have been making many trips to his patients since day-break.

After bath, Dr. Corney again escorted me to the hospital room to get fresh dressings. As the wounds were being dressed the dispensary assistant brought in a finely finished walking stick. I knew this one was for me. Dr. Corney examined it and said, "A little too long. Cut it

### THREE COFFINS ON THE DECK

off three inches shorter." "But, Doc."—I protested, "I don't think I really need a stick."

"That is because," Doctor Corney said firmly, "you don't like to use the stick." That sealed up the stick problem. He then continued in a soft tone, very understandingly, "The stick will relieve a lot of pressure from your right foot and help it heal up faster." I quietly obeyed. When I was leaving the room the doctor made sure that the stick was with me.

Pathak and Dikshit were allowed to move about today. We all wore shirts and shorts, of far oversize dimensions. Pathak looked strange without his glasses. Dikshit couldn't wear a shirt, so he just hung it loose over the shoulders. Both had their right arms in slings. I had a bandage on my head, something like a Burmese national head-wear. Pathak and Dikshit expressed their desire to see the control bridge of the ship and were readily permitted. Very reluctantly, because of my injured feet, the doctor permitted me to go to the bridge.

*Dampier*, with her austere white, majesty steamed into the straits of Singapore leaving behind a white trail. The sun had long since glided down from the zenith into the western sky. Land on either side, at some distance, rich with deep green, was picturesque. Numerous vessels lay anchored about in the neighbouring waters and quite a few were plying up and down the stream.

We three were seated in the gangway at the right hand edge of the ship, with Dr. Corney accompanying us. As we watched the pier come closer, we clearly saw a hundred odd cameramen eager to shoot at their target—that was us. I have seen on the screen what happens on such occasions and was a little worried. Before *Dampier* touched

the pier, we were huddled in Commander Row's drawing room. It was modestly decorated with a choice of modern furniture with pleasing colour combinations. The pleasantness of the room was the expression of the Commander's own character and taste. The two Chinese paintings on the walls added a splash of colour to the room's otherwise sombre look.

Commander Row was already out on the deck. Dr. Corney escorted us into the room and went out. From here nothing was visible and we couldn't know what was happening outside.

## NEWS FLASH

Singapore, *April 14, 1955.*

CAPT. VISHWANATHAN\*, who returned from KUCHING said he was considerably surprised at the statement published in a local newspaper, of the passenger, Mr. Pirola, who had flown in the plane from Bombay to Hong Kong.

The statement reported that a furious discussion took place between the flight crew and ground engineer for nearly two hours. This is absolutely incorrect, he (Capt. Vishwanathan) said.

They certainly talked the snag over as is normally done, and there was no argument about it.

"I think it is improper of people to make statements without being in possession of facts" said Capt. Vishwanathan.

—*Singapore Standard*

\* Divisional Operations Manager of Air-India International

SINGAPORE, *April 14, 1955.*

THE BRITISH FRIGATE, H.M.S. *Dampier*, arrived in Singapore today with three survivors from the crash of the Air-India International Constellation, "*Kashmir Princess*."

The three survivors—the co-pilot Captain M. C. Dikshit, the Flight Navigator Mr. J. C. Pathak, and Maintenance Engineer Mr. A. S. Karnik—were all injured but were able to walk the gang plank to waiting ambulances.

The *Dampier* also brought back the bodies of three of the sixteen killed. The bodies were those of the Flight Engineer, Mr. K. F. D'Cunha; the Assistant Purser, Mr. J. J. Pimenta, and a third which was unidentified.

—U.P.A. and “*Times of India*” News Service.

## Journey Homewards

SINGAPORE. We would soon be stepping on a land quite familiar. We had come here many times on our regular service. But this time it will not be quite the same familiarity. For this time we will not be going to the hotel—to a hospital, instead. It was a Thursday and our next service home will be only on Sunday. Until then we will have to get used to new surroundings, new persons. In a way we ourselves had become new persons !

The three of us sat there wrapped up in a tense silence, only occasionally exchanging a word. It seemed a long, very long time since Dr. Corney left the room and someone now knocked and turned the door handle. Commander Row entered, followed by the Admiral-in-Charge of the British Naval Unit at Singapore ; H.E. Sri Tandon, the Indian High Commissioner in Malaya ; Captain Vishvanath, himself an ace pilot and Divisional Operations Manager of the Air-India International, Mr. Kaul from the A. I. I.'s Singapore traffic office, and lastly Dr. Corney. The new-comers greeted and congratulated us. We bade good-bye to Commander Row, Dr. Corney, Lt. Hughes and other members of the crew present on the deck and thanked them all and Dr. Corney in particular, for the meticulous care which they all had taken to make us comfortable. It was arranged that newspaper reporters would not be allowed to meet us. But from the moment we stepped on the gangplank till we boarded the ambulance the camera flashes kept blinking at us.

From Thursday evening till Sunday morning we stayed in Singapore, during which time H.E. Sri Tandon, Captain Vishvanath and Mr. Kaul spared no pains to make us comfortable, so much so that we got worried that Captain Vishvanath, in trying to look after us, might get sick himself through exhaustion, and we cautioned him about it.

Morning of 17 April 1955. As I was about to step aboard the A. I. I. constellation, *Maratha Princess* for a homeward journey, I couldn't help thinking that only six days ago on a similar morning, its sister airliner, the beautiful *Kashmir Princess* stood on Kai-Tak airport, Hong Kong, with the same grace and majestic appearance. All the members of its crew were gay and lively. And now two were dead, the fate of the others was unknown, and the elegant *Kashmir Princess*, shattered to bits lay at the bottom of the sea.

After a comfortable journey under the care of Commander Pathy, the aircraft touched down at the Santa Cruz airport, Bombay. We all braced ourselves to face a new phase in life. All our relatives and colleagues and friends had spent agonizing moments since the news of the crash. The possibility of our returning was small. When I saw the fire on the wing, the wing burning away like paper, I had very little hope of escaping death. Even if I survived the crash, I knew that a hundred other fearful odds might swallow me. I knew that only a miracle could save anyone from such a catastrophe. And yet the miracle *had* happened. I *was* alive, and now I was safely back in India.

After the rest of the passengers had alighted, Dikshit stepped out followed by Pathak and myself. I was delighted to see that my mother, father and Kamal were there

## JOURNEY HOMEWARDS

among a host of friends. As we got down we were greeted by a number of high officials of the Air-India International.

It was a nice feeling to be back. A week ago I stood on the same place. It was a long journey through a short period of time. My colleagues and I had travelled not only to the Great Natuna islands in the South China Sea, but we had actually travelled up to the frontiers of Death ! And five of us—four brave men and one brave woman—had not come back, would never come back !

## NEWS FLASH

SINGAPORE, *April 13, 1955.*

MR. A.S. KARNIK, Ground Engineer, travelling in the Air-India Airliner *Kashmir Princess* which crashed in the South China sea said in a statement that the plane crashed because of fire in the hydraulic system in the port wing.

—*Reuter.*

BOMBAY, *April 17, 1955.*

THE THREE SURVIVING crew members of the Air-India International's *Kashmir Princess* are of the view that "the explosion and fire in the plane emanated from an extraneous source wholly unconnected with the structure of the aircraft, and that they were not caused by the failure of any part of airframe, engines, or fuel and other systems in the aircraft."

—*Indian Express.*

BOMBAY, *April 25, 1955.*

"...ONLY THREE SURVIVORS, all Indians were fished out of the sea. Engineer A.S. Karnik, taken aboard the British frigate *Dampier*, gave the first authentic explanation of the crash : a hydraulic fire in the port wing. The plane broke into three pieces when it hit the sea.

“This sounded more like a common accident than sabotage...”

—*Time*, NEW YORK

In a letter to the editor of the Times of India, A.S. Karnik wrote :-

“...On landing from H.M.S. *Dampier* on April 14, Capt. Vishvanath enquired from me as to the reported message “fire in the hydraulic port wing” sent in my name. I was surprised at the query and told him that except for two telegrams to my relatives regarding my health, I had given no other message. I was prepared to give this in writing so that he could contradict it.

“Later on in Bombay, I informed the Operations and Engineering Manager of the Air-India International of this meaningless and false statement published in my name.....

“I hereby deny having made any such statement at any time.”

BOMBAY, *May 18, 1955.*

A. S. Karnik.

MANILA, *May 14 1955.*

DR. IMAWAN, Head of the Indonesian Team of Investigators, denied charges that the *Kashmir Princess* had been sabotaged. He said that the findings of the group thus

far had proved "satisfactory," and that the crash was an ordinary accident.

—*American News Agency Report.*

HONG KONG, *May 14, 1955.*

Mr. I. IMAWAN, Indonesian Head of the Commission investigating the crash of the Air India International Constellation *Kashmir Princess* today denied reports from Manila that the investigations so far had proved "satisfactory" and that the crash was an ordinary mishap.

—*Reuter.*

NEW DELHI, *May 26, 1955.*

THE INDONESIAN Inquiry Committee, which investigated into the crash of Air-India International's *Kashmir Princess*, last month, has determined that the accident was caused by an explosion of a timed infernal machine (bomb) placed in the starboard wheel-well of the aircraft.

HONG KONG, *May 27, 1955.*

THE HONG KONG Government said today that it had every reason to believe that the bomb which wrecked the Indian airliner carrying Chinese officials to the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung was planted in the plane in Hong Kong.

—*Reuter.*

## Report on the Crash

THE INDONESIAN ENQUIRY COMMITTEE said, that the explosion resulted puncturing No. 3 tank and in uncomfortable fire.

An inspection of the wreckage, it added, revealed positive evidence of an explosion in the star-board wheel-well of a timed infernal machine (bomb), parts of which were still trapped in the wreckage.

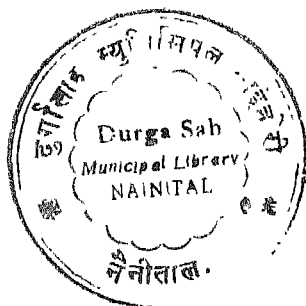
The recovery of four parts of a twisted, burnt and corroded clockwork mechanism, which has no relation to any equipment or structure of the aircraft, trapped in the same area where the explosion occurred, provided irrefutable evidence of an infernal machine (bomb), having been placed in this area, the Committee observed in conclusion.

The other findings of the Committee are :

- (1) The aircraft was air-worthy and properly certified.
- (2) The crew was experienced and held valid licences.
- (3) The aircraft was properly loaded and had sufficient fuel for the flight.
- (4) The take-off from Hong Kong was normal and the flight uneventful for the first five hours.

#### KASHMIR PRINCESS

- (5) An explosion occurred on board the aircraft when cruising at 18,000 feet over the sea. A fire broke out in the starboard wing and spread rapidly causing failure of the hydraulic and electrical service.
- (6) A rapid descent for ditching was immediately commenced and the emergency procedures were carried out efficiently and calmly by the crew members under extremely difficult conditions.
- (7) The aircraft hit the water with the starboard wing-tip while under partial loss of control and broke up on impact.



## NEWS FLASH

LONDON, *January 11, 1956.*

THE BRITISH COLONIAL Office reported today that a Hong Kong airport employee sabotaged the Air-India International plane carrying Chinese diplomats to Bandung in April last, and escaped to Formosa . . . . .

Kuomintang authorities have refused to hand him over for trial.

The saboteur was identified as Chow-Tse-ming, alias, Chou Chu, an employee of the Hong Kong Aircraft Engineering Corporation.

"Evidence came to light", the report said, "to suggest that he had been procured by persons connected with a Kuomintang intelligence organisation and had been offered a reward."

On September 3, the Hong Kong Police obtained a warrant for this man's arrest on a charge of conspiracy to murder.

"As soon as the warrant was issued, the Nationalist (KMT) authorities in Formosa were requested to return the man for trial. After repeated reminders they informed H. M.'s Consul at Tamsui on December 14, that the competent authorities were unable to deal with the matter since the request was not based on legal grounds."

—U.P.A. and "Times of India" News Service.

## Dedication

*I still feel as though the crash had just taken place, so vivid is my memory of everyone aboard. I can see Gloria with untold courage emerging out of the dense black smoke with a handful of life-jackets moving towards the cockpit with unfaltering steps ; Captain Fatar holding the control wheel with all his might, up to the bitter end, in a heroic attempt to keep the airplane flying level—courageously cool, not a line of fear across his pleasant face, giving orders in unperturbed tone ; D'Cunha working the engine controls in quick succession with a constant gaze at the multitude of dials, carrying out the Captain's orders with extraordinary alertness in the very face of Death ; D'Souza and Pimenta who stayed with the passengers all along and, with Gloria, braced them with life-jackets.*

*And the passengers---eight Chinese, one Viet Minh, one Polish and one Austrian. Never had I imagined that men in ordinary walks of life could muster such iron-willed courage to meet death. Even members of a suicide squad on suicidal mission in a war may show signs of fear. But these men had the will of steel, there was not a stir amongst them, not a trace of fear on anyone's face ; they all sat grimly in their seats and paid no heed to the massive fire on their right nor to the black suffocating smoke that penetrated the cabin and their lungs. Never had death been mocked with such humility. Never had human courage equalled such magnificence. I wish my powers of discription were equal*

#### DEDICATION

*to the task of recounting in full the courage, devotion to duty and self-sacrifice of my five colleagues who, alas, are no more, and of the two friends who shared with me the perils of the South China Sea for those eight long hours when Death kept us constant company. . . .*

*And so I close this inadequate account of the last flight of the KASHMIR PRINCESS, with a humble tribute to the glorious memory of Captain Jatar, of D'Cunha, Pimenta, D'Souza and Gloria Berry, and of the eleven passengers, in all sixteen conscientious, peace loving persons who were killed, murdered in cold blood, along with the beautiful KASHMIR PRINCESS by the devilish agent who planted that infernal time-bomb in the wheel-well. May their souls rest in peace—for they are martyrs indeed, who bravely gave their lives in the noblest cause of all—the cause of peace! To all sixteen of them this book is humbly and affectionately dedicated.*

A. S. KARNIK.

# The Crew and the Passengers

## THE CREW

|                     |    |                               |
|---------------------|----|-------------------------------|
| CAPT. D. K. JATAR   | .. | Commander                     |
| CAPT. M. C. DIKSHIT | .  | Co-Pilot                      |
| MR. J. C. PATHAK    | .. | Flight Navigator              |
| MR. K. F. D'CUNHA   | .. | Flight Engineer               |
| MR. C. D'SOUZA      | .. | Flight Purser                 |
| MR. J. J. PIMENTA   | .. | Asst. Flight Purser           |
| MISS GLORIA BERRY   | .. | Air Hostess                   |
| MR. A. S. KARNIK    | .. | Aircraft Maintenance Engineer |

## THE PASSENGERS

|                       |    |                        |
|-----------------------|----|------------------------|
| DR. FRIEDRICH JENSEN  | .. | Austrian Correspondent |
| MR. JEREMI STRACE     | .. | Polish Correspondent   |
| MR. VUONG PINH PHOONG |    | Viet Minh Official     |
| MR. SHIH CHIH-ANG     | .. | Chinese Delegate       |
| MR. LI CHAO-CHI       | .. | -do-                   |
| MR. CHUNG PU-YUN      | .. | -do-                   |
| MR. SHEN CHIEN-TU     | .. | -do-                   |
| MR. WANG TSO-MEI      | .. | -do-                   |
| MR. TU HUNG           | .. | -do-                   |
| MR. LI PING           | .. | -do-                   |
| MR. HAO FENG-KO       | .. | -do-                   |

# Brief Life—Sketches

## THE CREW

### CAPTAIN DAMODAR KASHINATH JATAR

Born at Buldana, Berar, India, on 10th January 1914. Had his secondary school education at Nagpur, Panchgani and Poona. After two years of college education in arts, due to his adventurous aptitude was inclined to join the army. He was provisionally selected and since no confirmation was received from the army he joined the Bombay Flying Club in June 1935. Two years later he joined the Tata Air Lines.

In November 1939, he had to force land his aircraft in a field under difficult weather conditions. Very skillfully he managed it without much damage to his machine. This feat marked him out as an exceptionally good pilot.

His next big achievement was when he partook in the search for the *Malabar Princess* which had crashed in the Alps in 1950. Amongst the score of airplanes, civil and military, that scoured the Alps for two days under hazardous snow storm, he was the one that by his sheer will, discovered the wreckage of the crashed airplane.

During his flying career, amongst the dignitaries he flew to different parts of the world, he had the honour of flying our Prime Minister Hon. Sri Jawaharlal Nehru.

Destiny had willed what he had said to his parents when they had tried to dissuade him taking the flying career : "Since Death is inevitable, I would much rather meet it in airplane than through long illness in the bed."

He died a hero's death. He was seated with his hands on the control wheel.

The President of India awarded posthumously **ASHOKA CHAKRA CLASS I** for his conspicuous bravery in ditching the **KASHMIR PRINCESS** under the most difficult conditions.

He is survived by his widow and three children.

#### **CAPTAIN MAHESH CHANDRA DIKSHIT**

Born at Jubbulpore on 22-9-1917.

The President of India awarded him **ASHOKA CHAKRA CLASS II** for his conspicuous bravery in face of certain disaster.

#### **JAGDISH CHANDRA PATHAK**

Comes from a place called Manipuri in U.P., India. Studied at Government High School, Manipuri. Graduated in Science in 1945 from Allahabad and in the same year joined the Royal Navy in England for training. In 1947 joined the Air Service Training Ltd., at Hamble to qualify as an Aircraft Licensed Engineer. In 1949 became a Flight Navigator and joined Air-India International in 1950.

He was married in 1952. Of the two children, the

girl was born on 1st May 1955 after his return from the crash.

He was awarded **ASHOKA CHAKRA CLASS III** by the President of India for conspicuous bravery in the face of certain disaster.

#### **KENNETH D'CUNHA**

Born at Bombay on 27-10-1928.

Commenced his primary education at "Villa Theresa" Pedder Road, Bombay. Later, studied at St. Theresa High School and passed Matriculation examination from St. Stanislaus' High School.

Completed Intermediate (Science) from St. Xavier's College.

His residence being in the vicinity of the Santa Cruz aerodrome, the constant hovering of the airplanes lured him to take up to aviation, and much against his parents' wishes, joined Air-India International in August 1951.

Joined flight engineering in November 1952. He was married to Dr. Joan Pereira on 9th May 1954.

The President of India awarded posthumously **ASHOKA CHAKRA CLASS III** for his conspicuous bravery in the face of certain disaster.

He is survived by his widow and a posthumously born son.

## CEDRIC D'SOUZA

Was born on 5th September 1932 in Poona, India. Studied at St. Xavier's High School and later at Don Bosco's High School in Matunga, Bombay. After one year of college studies at St. Xavier's, he joined the National Bank of India. Since there weren't any immediate prospects with the bank, he joined Air-India International in October 1953. A year later he was married.

A keen sportsman, he represented his school, college and the bank in the field of hockey.

The President of India posthumously awarded **ASHOKA CHAKRA CLASS III** for his conspicuous bravery in the face of certain disaster.

He is survived by his widow.

## JOSEPH PIMENTA

Born in Bombay in September 1925.

Studied at St. Elizabeth and Don Bosco's High School in Bombay.

A keen photographer, worked with the Indian Air Force, during the last war, as an aerial photographer. After the war he joined the Times of India as a staff photographer.

He joined Air-India International in October 1953.

For his conspicuous bravery in the face of certain disaster the President of India awarded **ASHOKA CHAKRA CLASS III** posthumously.

To his bereaved parents and brother Eric and sister Anita, his is an irreparable loss.

#### MISS GLORIA BERRY

Was born at Jubbulpore, India, on 25th July 1932. Commenced her school education at Karachi and completed her secondary high school education at Cathedral and John High School in Bombay. Passed Pianoforte Higher Local examination of the Trinity College of Music at the age of 14. Painting and needle work were her hobbies.

Joined AIR-INDIA in December 1950, much against her parents' wishes.

She was soon to marry an executive from Trans-World Airlines, serving at Lisbon.

The President of India awarded posthumously **ASHOKA CHAKRA CLASS II** for her conspicuous bravery in the face of certain disaster of the **KASHMIR PRINCESS**.

To Major & Mrs. Berry and sister Silvia and brother Trevor, hers is an irreparable loss.

#### THE PASSENGERS

#### SHIH CHIH-ANG

Born in 1914; served as Manager of the East China Branch Company of the China National Import & Export Corporation; representative of the China National Import

and Export Corporation at Berlin and Deputy Manager of the China National Import and Export Corporation.

LI CHAO-CHI

Born in 1920, served in the Information Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs since 1951.

CHUNG PU-YUN

Born in 1913, served as soldier, squad-leader, section chief etc. elected Model Worker in 1945.

SHEN CHIEN-TU

Born in 1915, Director of the English Broadcasting Department of the Hsinhua News Agency ; Director of the Information Department of the International Information Bureau etc. During the Korean Armistice Talks, he was the head of the Information Department of the Delegation of the Korean People's Army and the Chinese People's Volunteers.

WANG TSO-MEI

Born in 1916, served as Director of the Hong Kong Office of the Tung-kiang Detachment of the Chinese People's Liberation Army; head of the Hong Kong Branch Office of the Hsinhua News Agency.

TU HUNG

Born in 1918, Editor of the North China Hsinhua Daily ; Translation Editor of the Hsinhua News Agency ;

chief of the Reporting Section of the Political Department of Chinese People's Liberation Army ; Deputy Director of the Broadcasting Department for Foreign Countries of the Central People's Radio and Deputy Secretary General of the All China Journalists' Association.

#### LI PING

Born in 1929, correspondent of the Hsinhua News Agency.

#### HAO FENG-KO

Born in 1926, served as army photographer, correspondent and Newsreel Documentary film photographer.

#### DR. FRIEDRICH JENSEN

An Austrian journalist. He was a qualified physician, writer and a poet. With the International Brigade he had fought Franco. He rendered medical assistance to Mao-Tse-tung's wounded soldiers. He presented to the European public a first hand account of the new-born China.

MR. JEREMI STRACE—A Polish correspondent and  
MR. VUONG PINH PHOONG—A Viet-Minh official

It is regretted that their life-sketches could not be made available at the time of printing.

## ERRATA

| <i>Page</i> | <i>Line</i> | <i>For</i>                                      | <i>Read</i>                                                                 |
|-------------|-------------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Facing<br>1 | 4           | HAI FENG-<br>KO                                 | HAO FENG-KO                                                                 |
| 34          | 5           | (Very Important<br>Personnel)                   | (Very Important Persons)                                                    |
| 84          |             | 108°E<br>4°N                                    | 4°N<br>108°E                                                                |
| 85          | 27          | Nine Chinese                                    | Eight Chinese                                                               |
| 86          | 1           | one Polish and<br>one Austrian<br>correspondent | one Polish and one<br>Austrian correspondants<br>and one Viet-Minh official |
| 137         | 19          | completed<br>and I                              | completed, I                                                                |
| 145         | 20          | majesticity                                     | majestically                                                                |
| 155         | 3           | uncomfortable                                   | uncontrollable                                                              |

